

APOCALYPSE BRINGER MYNOGHRA

-WORLD CONQUEST STARTS WITH THE CIVILIZATION OF RUIN-

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Apocalypse Bringer Mynoghra: World Conquest Starts with the Civilization of Ruin, Volume 3

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Apocalypse Bringer Mynoghra: World Conquest Starts with the Civilization of Ruin, Volume 3

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Prologue

BETWEEN successfully making peaceful contact with the multiracial empire of Phon'kaven despite a rocky start and entering into an alliance with another world power, Mynoghra's last turn had netted them results that ran counter to their nature as an evil civilization.

But alliances always involve give and take.

In return for establishing friendly relations with Phon'kaven, Mynoghra was tasked with defending Dragontan—a Phon'kaven town built close to the Accursed Lands. Of course, Takuto had turned the negotiations in his favor. He'd succeeded in gaining the right to use the Dragon Vein Mine, a strategic resource point, located in Dragontan.

...Mynoghra was steadily increasing its national power on all fronts: constructing new facilities, strengthening the troops, raising future leaders who were showing rapid growth and reliability, and most of all, with the summoning of a new Hero unit, Isla, Queen of bugs.

Mynoghra's foundation as a strong empire was beginning to solidify thanks to several well-planned strategies that had played out in a matter of a few weeks.

But it was just when Takuto thought everything was going perfectly according to plan that they'd stumbled across the strange phenomenon of defeated Barbarians mysteriously vanishing into thin air, leaving a puzzling gold coin where their corpses should've been. The moment Takuto had shared Atou's vision and confirmed what the design on that coin meant, he was alerted to the sudden appearance of a massive Barbarian horde.

Forces had appeared from yet another game Takuto had often played during his last life.

Mynoghra's King Takuto Ira was about to be forced to make some hard choices by the military forces closing in on Dragontan that functioned under

entirely different rules and mechanics from *Eternal Nations*.



“IT’S like...a festival.”

Takuto concisely evaluated the situation to no one in particular.

Bringing a civilization from *Eternal Nations* to life in this unknown world was inconceivable enough as it was. Obviously, he had considered the possibility of other civilizations showing up too, but not from an entirely different game.

“Brave Questers, your run-of-the-mill classic JRPG,” Takuto uttered the name of that game to himself.

His fading memories vividly came back to him, bringing a wave of nostalgia with them. *Brave Questers* was a timeless masterpiece full of appealing characters that was beloved by many people and still played to this day.

“Atou, can you hear me?” Takuto stopped thinking to himself and calmly sent a telepathic message to his confidant. A wide grin spread across his face at her immediate response. *“Okay, listen up, I’m about to explain our winning strategy.”*

He began explaining the game he’d become so addicted to he’d played it enough times to have memorized the strategy guides.

Evil forces worlds apart were on the verge of clashing.

Chapter 1: Invasion

JUST as Phon’kaven’s town of Dragontan had identified a horde of Barbarians in the distance, some among the Barbarians were licking their lips while observing their far-off prey.

“Flamin, hath the Demon Lord given his orders?”

Hill Giants, Goblins, Orcs, and various demons made up the horde. A single block of ice spoke amid the monsters typically categorized as Barbarians.

Nay, it was a living creature, not an inanimate one.

The strange man covered entirely in ice had a huge body twice the size of an adult male and carried a giant axe to match his size. His appearance was too warped to describe as human—it’d be more apt to view him as compressed ice crystals with a will of its own.

This man, who was clearly in a league of his own within the horde, had directed his question toward the man standing next to him as he observed Dragontan.

“Kihehe! He sure did, Ice Rock. ‘Go at it the same as always,’ he said.”

The man who’d answered was equally strange-looking. Unlike the man of ice, he stood around the same height as a typical Human or Orc. However, his sickly thin body and the unceasing flames encasing him from head to toe highlighted his abnormality.

The man of ice was Frost General Ice Rock.

The man of flame was Flame Demon Flamin.

Both were generals in the Demon Lord’s Army and key boss characters in the role-playing game *Brave Questers*.

Frost General Ice Rock’s body creaked as he opened his mouth that didn’t look like a mouth. “Is there any intel on what kind of world we, the Demon

Lord's Army, hath been suddenly summoned *to?*"

"Hm? Ah, yeah, ain't that different from the last one! Kihehe! World's full of monsters, magic, and endlessly breeding Humans," Blazing General Flamin answered with a sadistic smile without looking at Ice Rock.

Having already sent his subordinates to scout and investigate, Flamin knew this world better than anyone else in the Demon Lord's Army.

...It was only just the other day that the Demon Lord's Army had awoken in this strange new land.

In their previous world, they had an archnemesis known as the Hero. The Demon Lord had set out to fight the final battle with this Hero who was powerful enough to go toe-to-toe with the entire Demon Lord's Army *alone*.

On that day, the two generals, who'd been revived by the Demon Lord after being defeated by the Hero once before, were confronting the Hero who was coming for their lord's head. They had waited in the Demon Lord's Castle Hall, their last and final stronghold, to intercept and finally bring an end to the hateful Hero, hoping they could at last offer victory up to the lord they served.

The final battle had begun at long last. Swords clashed in an exchange of blows and spells launched every which way.

Angry roars, screams, war cries.

Many of their companions were once again slain by the overwhelming power possessed by puny humans. But then what happened next had been obscured from their memories as if a fog rolled in and blocked it out.

As they watched their comrades get torn apart like scraps of paper, the remaining demons raised their voices and charged in to retaliate, when—they suddenly found themselves standing in the middle of a barren field.

It was just their master, the Demon Lord, and a few of the named high-ranking demons who found themselves there, surrounded on all sides by a wasteland. They were left with neither a glorious victory that would let them lead the world into darkness nor a humiliating defeat at the hands of light.

All they had were themselves and nothingness.

...That all transpired just about a week ago.

The Demon Lord immediately brought the confused demons under control, and they were quick to act after that. First came surveying this new land. Then came calling their subordinates with a summoning skill and constructing the Demon Lord's Castle to be their base of operations. Finally, they turned their sights to building and maintaining an army.

Their objectives hadn't changed. Even if the world and rules it was governed by had.

They had swiftly laid down the groundwork necessary to achieve their sole goal.

And once the stage was set at lightning speed, they moved to overrun this world just like they had tried to do in the last.



“**TIS** a beautiful world, indeed,” General Ice Rock muttered to no one in particular, slowly raising his cold eyes to the heavens above.

He could see birds comfortably soaring through the cloudless, blue sky. The land itself was so vast it seemed endless, and the breath of resilient life could be sensed even from the barren wilds.

Ice Rock didn't understand why he was in this peculiar situation or what he was supposed to do in this world.

All demons were driven forward by the Demon Lord's orders. They always wielded their full power, following the instincts raging within them like a flooding river. Everything was done to fulfill their almighty Demon Lord's wish: to annihilate humanity and create a paradise for demons. Such ambitions were what allowed them to live how they pleased and were also the reason for their existence.

“Our mission is to conquer the *world*. We'll annihilate humanity and build our *paradise*.”

The Demon Lord's orders were to “Conquer.”

Just as they had been in the last world, so they were in this one.

Ice Rock would turn himself into a mighty hunting dog per his lord's wishes. He would once again trample countless cities and extinguish human activity as he had before. The world may be different, but his actions remained unchanged. And so, to fulfill his role as hunter, he set his sights on the town assigned to be his first prey in this world.

"...Is that the first sacrifice? A human town that'll become the cornerstone of our supremacy."

"Hehe! Apparently, it belongs to a kingdom called Phon'kaven. One of the beastly scouts I caught real nice in my snare was awful quick to tell me everythin'!"

"Hmph. Distasteful as always."

Unlike his fellow general, Ice Rock had more of an honorable warrior's disposition. That nature of his despised Flamin's brutality and took form in his critical remarks.

Beastmen scouts had been sent out from what should've been a human town. Beastmen tend to be closer aligned to demons and monsters. Some races dislike conflict, but they're generally incompatible with humans.

What in the glacial fields is one doing scouting for humans? That doubt crossed Ice Rock's mind but dissipated as quickly as it came. He likely didn't have the ability to think for himself.

Acting solely according to the Demon Lord's orders was what defined the Four Generals of the Demon Lord's Army. Nay, Ice Rock believed that defined every demon and monster alike who served the Demon Lord.

At the same time, some vague discomfort he couldn't put his finger on was niggling at the back of his mind. Of course, he didn't have the time to analyze and confirm the feeling in detail. The Demon Lord had ordered him to "Conquer the world," and taking action took precedence over everything else.

Ice Rock shook his hard head to shake off his concerns as indecipherable unease took root in the pit of his stomach. Before long, his inorganic ice eyes shone with his resolve, and he put another question to Flamin to place the mission at the forefront of his mind.

“...It is what it *is*. Did the Demon Lord say anything about how we should conquer the *town*?”

“Anything goes! We’re free to use whatever monsters and strategies our wicked hearts’ desire!”

“‘Tis fortunate the Orcs and Goblins joined our *army*. World conquest will be much easier with *them*.”

There was one reason why their forces had grown this large in such a short span of time. A stroke of good luck befell them when they were still worried their army wasn’t strong enough with just their summoned underlings. This luck came in the form of the local monsters offering their allegiance to the Demon Lord and applying to join his army. What they lacked in strength, they made up for in numbers. It was a fortuitous situation indeed.

Then again, more than half had been expended during the several reconnaissance missions they’d conducted to get a feel for their prey’s strength... In any case, it was a cheap price to pay to obtain information on the humans. These monsters were never a part of their original army, anyway. As the one in charge of scouting out Phon’kaven’s strength, Flamin was happy with these results that netted them a decent amount of information on the local humans.

“Kihehe! It reminds me of the good ol’ days waging war on the ol’ world! Of those first days when we demons invaded human lands and destroyed an unmemorable kingdom in a single night!” Flamin enthused with disturbing glee.

Ice Rock also remembered those days of yore. The day everything started. The battle over the world with humans—with the Hero. Those days he swung his battle-axe to bring all to their knees before the Demon Lord. And he remembered the decisive battle with the Hero. An avalanche of information cascaded into Ice Rock’s mind with the flood of memories racing through him like a raging river.

That disturbing, niggling feeling grew more prominent.

“Flamin, this is an odd query, *but*...”

“Huh? What is it?”

“...What of our original ambitions? How fare they?”

“Huuuh? Why do ya care...?”

Ice Rock couldn't forget the concerns he'd tried to shake off and voiced them instead.

Those final moments—Ice Rock vividly remembered participating in the battle that would decide the world's champion. He remembered the moment when the Hero easily defended against his Ultimate Attack and shattered his ice core with his return blow. Ice Rock remembered how he fell back and stared through his hazy consciousness at the Demon Lord fighting the Hero.

Everything that followed was vague.

He had assumed he'd perished after that, but that answer didn't check out with the fragments of obscured memories he had pieced back together. In which case, had they been summoned to this world before the battle with the Hero was decided?

...No, that didn't check out either.

After all, Ice Rock had definitely seen the Hero's blade pierce the Demon Lord in his final moments...

Thus, he endured his shame to ask Flamin. He chose to borrow his serpentine wisdom despite knowing that Flamin was scheming to outsmart the other three generals to become the Demon Lord's closest aide. He hoped he'd find the answers to the discomfiting doubts surging within him.

However...

“Meh! Doesn't matter! Gettin' the prey in front of ya comes first, doesn't it?! Am I wrong, Ice Rock?!”

“...You're *not*.”

Unfortunately, Flamin didn't give the answer he was hoping for. Actually, Flamin did seem to pause and think about it. He was likely experiencing the same conundrum as Ice Rock.

Things started to get noisy around them. The monsters' excitement and thirst for blood had reached an uncontrollable high. With unintelligent growls and

strange cries filling the air, they didn't have time for idle chitchat anymore. Ice Rock sensed the time had come without finding the answer to his questions.

“Move out the monsters. We'll start by destroying this Dragontan town and offer up the suffering and despair of its humans to the Demon Lord.”

The adjutant waiting beside him, a demon clad in a robe with a wand in hand, nodded respectfully at his orders. The demon drew letters in the sky with some sort of magic spell. The unintelligent monsters slowly began their forward march on cue with that spell.

“What'll ye do, Flamin?”

“Ah, I'll sit this one out. You can have the lead. You'd better be grateful, Ice Rock!!”

“Is that so? You have my *gratitude*.”

The ice giant drew the enormous battle-axe from his back and brandished it with both hands. This was the thick and heavy weapon he had proudly slaughtered many an enemy with. None had stood before him and this battle-axe and lived to tell the tale—except for the Hero.

Ice Rock took a step forward. The earth shook, the dirt sinking and freezing under the giant's unbearable weight. He marched toward the town of Dragontan, aware of the gaze on his ice-cold back.

Flamin couldn't be trusted. Ice Rock couldn't understand what the man of flame was thinking.

But that was no excuse to stop in his tracks.

All was well if the Demon Lord obtained the world in the end. And Ice Rock had the power to make that dream a reality.

Everyone but us can perish.

So decided Ice Rock with the arrogance and short-sightedness of one of the Demon Lord's Four Generals.



FLAMIN spit on the ground with utter boredom and disinterest as he watched

Ice Rock and the monsters march toward the town, kicking up dust and dirt in their wake. But his expression instantly shifted when a bird-shaped monster covered in flames landed beside him and gave its report.

He turned his gaze toward the northwest with his lips twisting up in wicked delight.

Insubordinate, uncooperative, sadistically cruel.

If Ice Rock had an honorable warrior's disposition, then Flamin would be the living incarnation of a venomous snake.

Flamin gave the bird-shaped monster some sort of instructions. The bird took flight to loyally fulfill its master's orders.

Blazing General Flamin's gaze remained locked on one location, a faint smile tugging at his lips. His sadistic grin belonged to someone who didn't doubt he was an absolute being in the universe and a destroyer about to trample on innocent life.

"Hehehe! Guess I'll go snag us another town! To get one step closer to my goal!"

His sights were set in the direction of the Accursed Lands.

Term: RPG

A role-playing game (abbreviated RPG)is a general term for games in which players assume the roles of specific characters to experience a fictional story. There are several forms of role-playing games, but the abbreviated form typically refers to computer and console games. Brave Questers is often cited as the first computer RPG and the most influential role-playing game of all time that led to a boom in various consoles and console games being made. In recent years, the Brave Questers series has been released on a variety of platforms, from social games to online games, but the overall series genre is still classified as RPG.

Chapter 2: Two Shades of Evil Don't Mix

SEVERAL hours later.

The troops led by Frost General Ice Rock had already set up camp south of Dragontan and were putting pressure on the local armed forces. There was almost no resistance beyond the sporadic arrow shot to scare off monsters that had come too close. This did some minor damage to the general's troops, but viewed on a military scale, it was no different from being stung by a bee.

Seeing his opponent's meager resistance, Ice Rock nodded with the satisfying knowledge that things were proceeding smoothly to conquer the town.

"Hrm. I was staying cautious, but this is all they've *got*? I suppose 'tis to be expected given the town's *size*..."

Ice Rock had mobilized 5,000 troops for this operation. While it wasn't a large army by any means, it was the perfect fighting force composed of monsters that were physically stronger than puny humans. This base strength was further amplified by the addition of Frostfangs, Ice Rock's direct subordinates.

Considering the strength of his army, even if the town concentrated all its efforts on defense, it was bound to quickly fall before him. It was only natural for Dragontan, that'd chosen an open battlefield and was afraid of losing any soldiers, to go on the defensive despite knowing the consequences of siege warfare.

"But do ye spineless cowards even intend to engage in battle? Hm, humanity?"

Ice Rock would be disappointed if they didn't. He couldn't be proud of his military achievements if he unilaterally overran the town without running into any resistance. What was the point of taking the lead then? The current situation was unsatisfying to Ice Rock, who wanted to prove his usefulness to the Demon Lord by lavishly putting his power on display.

Were his feelings venting themselves by taking physical form? White, frigid air

enshrouded his entire body, and his limbs of ice creaked under the weight of the power he unleashed. The humanoid monsters with some semblance of intelligence all stepped away from the cold air, except for one demon who deliberately moved closer.

“General Ice Rock, the platoon is ready to be deployed.”

“What monsters are in *it*?”

“It consists of Hill Giant and Orc squads, sir. They will break down the gates to let the rest of the troops invade the town.”

Giant, aggressive monsters stepped to the front of the brigade, growling in response to those words. Everything was ready.

Ice Rock gave a big nod to his subordinates awaiting his signal.

“Let’s teach these humans and the fools who follow them a *lesson*,” he said, raising his voice loud enough to shake the earth as he gave the marching order—if nothing else, he’d at least get his glory by doing a spectacular job razing the town to the ground. “Charge!”

“Oooooooooooooooooohhhhhh!!!!”

The monsters shook the ground with roars that echoed into the distance, informing all life that the great Demon Lord’s first step toward world conquest in this land had commenced.

Yes, it’d begun. From this moment, their greatest wish would—

And then *it* happened. The heavens suddenly turned black and were consumed by eerie darkness.

The previously blue sky transmogrified into a horrifying, spine-tingling shade of black, and the passing clouds became a venomous shade of purple. The vast land below became even more distorted than the sky above. What should’ve been a barren wasteland started to rot and decay, giving off the stench of rotten eggs left in the sun.

Unrest shot through the Demon Lord’s Army like a lightning bolt at this abrupt shift in the environment around them. Even Ice Rock, who was said to be so brave he knew no fear, couldn’t hide his surprise.

It didn't take long for confusion to spread through the ragtag horde of monsters and demons.

"What the demi-hell is this?!"

"What's goin' on?!"

"What happened?!"

Ice Rock and the intelligent monsters and demons cried out as they looked around and took defensive positions. But they were visibly flustered over how to defend against the sudden environmental change surrounding them as far as the eye could see.

"Ice Mage! Report!"

"Th-This is likely the work of a spell! But I've never seen a spell with such a wide area of effect! It covers our entire battalion!" the demon mage standing right beside Ice Rock cried out as if he couldn't believe his eyes.

All the spells in his world were meant for a single target. He'd never heard of a wide-area spell that could affect a whole army or the terrain. He couldn't even imagine what effect it'd have.

"Calm the monsters!" Ice Rock finally ordered around the time monsters had started killing each other out of fear. His intelligent subordinates hurriedly tried to control the rampaging monsters with little luck.

They were no longer able to advance on the town.

Monsters are driven by their strong instincts. For that reason, they were easy enough to direct toward annihilating humanity, but it came with the disadvantage of them becoming uncontrollable in times of great duress and panic. Because they act based on intense instincts, they can't resist instinctual fear. Internecine strife had already caused considerable damage to their numbers.

If this kept up, they might have to call off conquering the town due to the weakening of their forces. While his limited number of demon subordinates frantically tried to control the situation, Ice Rock determined this bizarre phenomenon was the work of hostile forces, and he tried to analyze the

situation with mounting consternation.

...Odd. The Goblins, Orcs, Hill Giants, and their kind are growing more fatigued by the minute. Meanwhile, pure demons such as myself are growing stronger...

It almost seemed as if the environment was being recreated into one meant for the forces of darkness. He thought it strange that the nondemonic monsters were being negatively affected when they had a lot in common with the creatures that resided in the demon realm.

This was the difference between evil civilizations and chaotic neutral civilizations. The critical distinction between these alignments in *Eternal Nations* was what brought about this result, but it was nigh impossible for Ice Rock to even begin to guess at that possibility when those rules didn't apply in his world.

Did they use some sorta unique spell? And what is with this thick smell of darkness... Who the blazing inferno are we dealing with?

Things feeling oddly out of place made it difficult for Ice Rock to make a snap decision. That said, it didn't change the fact his troops were sustaining massive losses. Although Ice Rock and his fellow demon subordinates were growing stronger, there weren't enough of them to make up an army.

More than anything else, it took effort to destroy a town and wipe out every single hateful human. Ice Rock gnashed his teeth over the agonizing fact that he'd been robbed of his plan not to let a single pest escape. And then his subordinate had to go and make a remark that further stoked the flames of rage within him.

"General Ice Rock...c-could it be th-the Hero—"

"Don't utter that *name*!" Ice Rock rebuffed his subordinate in a quiet yet livid voice.

Just hearing the Hero mentioned brought a flood of detestable memories to the forefront of his mind. That odious creature constantly stood in the way of their road to world domination. The memory of having been felled by his hands steadily ate away at Ice Rock.

He gave his head a hard, creaky shake to dispel the ominous suggestion that

greatly displeased him. The monsters finally stopped panicking, perhaps because Ice Rock's efforts to hide his own turmoil had paid off. But morale had fallen to an all-time low.

Sensing that leaving things this way would negatively affect his town conquest, Ice Rock raised his battle-axe and his voice.

"Ye needn't fear the *Hero*! Nay, any enemy is but an obstacle to be trampled by the Demon Lord's *Army*! No matter who appears, I, one of the Demon Lord's Four Generals, will lay waste to *them*!"

His deep, powerful voice drew the monsters' attention to him. Just as the monsters' morale was beginning to rise from the instinctual relief and allegiance they felt toward Ice Rock, who could be so imposing during a crisis—

"*The Hero*, huh? Sounds like you really did come from an RPG. I assume being one of the Demon Lord's Four Generals makes you a powerful *unit*?"

A strange girl was standing in their midst. Mousy, ash-colored hair, crimson eyes, and long, pointed ears.

Ice Rock stared wide-eyed at this girl whose physical traits clearly marked her as belonging to the darkness. She had appeared before him with absolutely no presence, as if she were nothing more than an illusion or a mirage.

"What are ye, *girl*?" Ice Rock quietly asked, still surprised by this phenomenon that had bested his powerful detection abilities. "Yer no...*Hero*. Are ye a demon? Who are ye? Where did ye come *from*? Why are ye *here*? And what's this *Ar-Pi-Gee* ye speak *of*?"

The waves of darkness billowing from the girl astonished Ice Rock. She obviously didn't belong in this place, and he decided to talk before carelessly attacking someone who was clearly cut from the same evil cloth.

If she was a local demon, then there was no reason not to be friendly, and if she were to someday swear allegiance to the Demon Lord, then they may very well become comrades. Plus, this was a good way to obtain more information, so he considered talking the optimal course of action.

"Oh my gosh! That's a lot of questions. Oh, speaking of questions, is that person there your adjutant or something?"

The girl pointed to the demon who commanded the monsters beside Ice Rock. This was one of the demons who assisted him with strategic matters. When he noticed Atou's interest in him, the mage, who'd been keeping the monsters under control with his magic, pompously introduced himself.

"That's right! I am Frost General Ice Rock's adjutant, Frost Mage. A little wench like you should bow before m—"

Fresh blue blood sprayed everywhere as the Frost Mage right beside Ice Rock was pierced to death. Speared straight through his buttocks into his head by a tentacle that'd erupted from the ground at lightning speed, the demon convulsed twice before vanishing into thin air, leaving a gold coin in his place.

"Wench! What've ye done?!"

General Ice Rock's stone face was marred by surprise. He may have selected the Frost Mage to be his adjutant for his intellect, but he was by no means a weakling. Instantly recognizing his opponent's ability from that attack, he drew the giant battle-axe from his back and wielded it with an infuriated expression.

Ice Rock had forgotten to consider the possibility that the girl could be an absolute adversary who operated under different logic and convictions from himself... Nay, it wasn't even possible for him to consider it in the first place. After all, his people had never encountered a nonhuman enemy.

"Answer me! Who are ye, wench?!"

The girl chuckled at his angry roar. Countless tentacles extended from her back and skewered the defenseless demons who were concentrating on controlling the nearby monsters. Then came the death cries of the monsters.

Ice Rock glanced over his shoulder to see a gigantic insect had torn his supposedly *strong* soldiers to pieces. War cries rose from the direction of the town. When he looked, the gates had opened and a small platoon was coming out. Arrows and spells were launched in a volley from atop the outer bailey at the monsters ordered to destroy the town's external walls.

Ice Rock groaned, his stony face distorting with rage when he realized the initiative had been taken from him. The insect-type monsters that had appeared out of nowhere seemed to be compatible with the land and were

unilaterally eliminating the exhausted monsters. Worse yet, significant damage was being done by the humans' arrows and spells.

If nothing else, his mission to destroy the town gate and external walls was doomed to fail.

Such resistance shouldn't have been possible given his initial estimations, but it appeared they'd intentionally concealed their defensive capabilities.

And then there was the girl before him.

He fell into this one-sided predicament and was made a fool of in the short time he was distracted by her. His failure began the moment he let down his guard thinking she was cut from the same wicked cloth.

He had to kill the pesky girl. No, killing her wouldn't be enough.

With magma-like rage bubbling up inside him, Ice Rock exhaled a frosty breath. How did the girl perceive that action? Chuckling, she flashed a belittling smile as she pinched the sides of her dress and politely curtsied.

"How do you do? I'm Sludge Atou from the wonderful world of 4x strategy games. For the time being, I would like to kill every last one of you."

"YOU WIIIIIIIIIIIIIIITCH!!!!"

Ice Rock's shout echoed through the battlefield, signaling the opening of hostilities.

The first all-too-familiar war began for Mynoghra.

SYSTEM MESSAGE

EVENT: Declaration of War

Mynoghra has declared war on the Demon Lord's Army.

Mighty Commander 《Takuto Ira》

“Hmm, if we have to, then I might as well win... I'm not a fan of conflict, though.”

OK



MYNOGHRA'S prized Hero, Sludge Atou, and the Demon Lord Army's prized general, Frost General Ice Rock. Just before these two boss-level entities from different worlds crossed paths...

In the town of Dragontan, Mayor Antelise Antik commanded the Self-defense Force in a draconian manner no one knew she was capable of.

"Don't think about what comes next! Bring all the arrows to the outer walls! Evacuate all citizens to the northwest block! We're going to abandon the town as soon as we secure a path of retreat!"

Beastmen runners rushed around in response to the instructions she gave in rapid succession.

Antelise was standing on top of the southern gate's bailey wall. Under normal circumstances, the mayor should've retreated to a safer location to give orders, but certain circumstances made that impossible.

Town hall still hadn't recovered a quarter of its functions from the Kruklain Trading Company's recent act of treason. Trying to tackle this crippling disaster right after the last one was too much for her to handle alone. That was why she took command right where the action was. There was no room for middleman messengers to botch up their reports. Seeing and analyzing the situation for herself was more effective.

But even under such stressful circumstances, her brilliant mind made a calm analysis of the situation.

Dragontan was doomed to fall before long at this rate.

They needed something that could overturn the overwhelming difference in strength. Obviously, they couldn't expect reinforcements from Phon'kaven to save them. Of course, Antelise did still dispatch a messenger by horse. The request for reinforcements was signed by Staff Holder Pepe, who was currently focusing his efforts on leading the citizens to safety. The mainland would probably send reinforcements in response to a plea from one of their Staff Holders, but given the pinch they were already in, they'd never make it in time.

They had no choice but to play all their cards. Otherwise, they'd lose everything. Literally *everything*. That was how much evil and brutality Antelise sensed from the Barbarians, who'd marched close enough to be seen from the walls.

"O Elementals! Tell me the situation around Dragontan!"

Antelise activated a Search Spell using Elven Elemental Artes. Pale lights glowed and danced around her. However, the flickering grew unstable and eventually disappeared with a small pop.

"Urph! HurUUUUUAAAAAGHAGHUUUUUUH!" Antelise choked and threw up. "Guh... O Elementals, heed my call!"

She tried to use the same artes again. One of the soldiers guarding her hastened over in a panic.

"Mayor Antik! Stop this! You'll hurt yourself at this rate!"

"Forget about me! Do your job instead! I'll pay you handsomely for it later! Buy me as much time as you possibly can!" she shouted, rebuking the few familiar faces who'd survived the attack on town hall.

But there are some things sheer willpower and grit can't fix.

The fact was, her body had reached its limit from continually using Elemental Artes.

"Don't overdo it, Mayor Antelise," someone suddenly said to her as she cursed herself for neglecting her health too much for alcohol.

"Ugh, Sage Moltar."

The man who'd appeared behind her without her realizing it was the elder sage Mynoghra had sent. His infamous name was one of the most feared of all the Dark Elves who'd made a living as assassins. Antelise couldn't help being anxious when someone from the horror stories of her childhood suddenly showed up, even if he was there as reinforcements from an ally nation.

"Hoho! It makes me uncomfortable when you go rigid like that!"

His merry belly laugh made him seem just like a good-natured old man, if you could overlook the way he carried himself like a trained assassin who could kill

you in the blink of an eye. Antelise just couldn't feel comfortable around him when she could sense the evil at his core.

"Please hold off on abandoning the town just yet. Mynoghra's army has been dispatched to handle defense..."

"But Sage Moltar, we're massively outnumbered even with your forces. We're not even close to their numbers!" Antelise shouted at her ally for interfering in her decision.

Requests from an ally nation shouldn't be outright rejected. But they were in a state of emergency. She could never plead for enough forgiveness if the townspeople were slaughtered because she pandered to their allies.

Antelise didn't become mayor for the fame or money. Even if it resulted in bad blood between nations, she wouldn't go back on her decision now. Steely resolve gleamed in her green eyes.

"Sage Moltar, I can't accept your request."

But her unshakeable resolve was dispersed by yet another interruption.

"GYEGHYEE!"

"Hm? Who is— What the?! GYAAAAAAH! B-BIG B-BUUUUUUUGGGG!"

"Gyee?"

Several giant bugs suddenly surrounded her. They had mantis-like bodies and big, restlessly rolling eyeballs. Antelise nearly fainted before these creatures that dripped sticky, black fluid from their triangular mouths.



The soldiers guarding Antelise drew their weapons—

“Oooh, my mighty king! I’m grateful for the reinforcements!”

Elder Moltar cried out in delight before they could attack, finally making Antelise and her men realize these giant bugs belonged to Mynoghra.

“Sage...wh-what are they...?”

“Long-legged Bugs... They’re the handymen of our nation.”

The Long-legged Bugs gently rocked back and forth in response. They were originally assigned to patrol the area around Dragontan and the Accursed Lands. Takuto had sent them as reinforcements to defend against the Barbarian horde because of their fast movement speed. The Long-legged Bug’s high mobility really shined during emergencies like this.

Elder Moltar faced Antelise as he marveled at the magnitude of Takuto’s ingenuity in redirecting the Long-legged Bugs to this new task.

“They normally serve as Scouts, but with Lady Isla’s presence, they have sufficient Strength to participate in this battle.”

There were more than a few words she didn’t understand in this context, but Antelise was convinced Elder Moltar wasn’t lying. The waves of power exuding from the Long-legged Bugs served as the greatest proof of all.

Dragontan’s entire Town Defense Force wouldn’t be able to take on the few bugs standing before them now. She had no doubt they’d be able to tear her apart as easily as silk with her meager combat abilities. But...that horrifying image also attested to their terrifying usefulness in this pinch, which encouraged her.

“It’s my humble opinion that their presence will make it easier to protect the town.”

“Gyegyeh!”

Their constantly darting eyeballs were restlessly observing the Barbarian horde visible beyond the wall. Apparently, the Long-legged Bugs were gung-ho about their new mission and ready to jump into action at a moment’s notice.

Just as Antelise was about to request Elder Moltar's assistance as the town mayor, he suddenly dropped to one knee and began holding a conversation with someone through some sort of magic.

"Hohoho! It's quite encouraging for these old bones to be granted command of the situation here."

"Sage Moltar, what are you—"

"Pardon me, Mayor. We have just received instructions from our king. We shall now declare war on the Barbarians and launch the first strike."

Antelise could only dumbly gape at him after hearing that. Everything was happening on an outrageous scale and proceeding at whiplash speeds. And things continued to charge ahead while she was still processing.

"All right, Long-legged Bugs...go teach those fools clinging to Dragontan just who they are up against."

"Gygee!!"

At Elder Moltar's orders, the Long-legged Bugs ran down the walls and joined the fray. Regaining some semblance of her sanity with those grotesque bugs gone, Antelise turned on Elder Moltar in a flurry.

"P-Please wait, Sage! It's too dangerous to take preemptive action against an army that large! Do you have a plan?!"

Her concerns were valid. The normal course of action would be for Mynoghra's expeditionary forces and Dragontan's Defense Force to hole up within the town and hold their ground until reinforcements arrived. How could he make this rash decision when the addition of the Long-legged Bugs was the only thing that lent their defense against the siege a modicum of possible success?

Declaring war was paramount to asking to be defeated. What was he thinking? Antelise wouldn't be convinced until he explained things to her. Except...

"Worry not, Lady Atou is joining the fray."

Elder Moltar explained the whole plan with that single comment.

“M-Miss Atou alone?! She can’t do that! I’ll send out some of our men to support her!”

“There’s no need for that,” Elder Moltar calmly turned down Antelise’s panicked proposal.

“How is there *not*?! There are too many of them even for her!”

Antelise and Atou had already interacted several times. Antelise definitely acted awkward out of fear of the girl’s inherent wickedness, but Atou had treated her with unfettered kindness. Frankly, Antelise held a relatively favorable opinion of her. So, as a kind person herself, she was naturally shocked and worried about Atou’s deployment.

“Hohoho... I once shared the same misplaced worries as you, Mayor.”

However, Elder Moltar was telling her that her worry was misplaced.

“She is Mynoghra’s prized Hero exactly because...”

Euphoria and absolute confidence gleamed in his elderly eyes.

What exactly had to happen to acquire that level of unshakeable trust?

What kind of insane power did one have to show to obtain that level of absolute fanaticism?

“...she never loses.”

Antelise could only nod in response to Elder Moltar’s proclamation.

How did he perceive her response? Either way, once he saw her nod, he climbed onto the battlement and silently raised his staff in the air.

“Then it’s about time for these old bones to do their part.”

Dense magical power instantly gathered around him. Antelise instinctively backed away from the presence of darkness unlike anything she’d ever experienced before. Glimpsing her move out of the corner of his eye, Elder Moltar swung his staff down in the direction of the Barbarian horde clustering in front of the town.

“Ruin Magic: Cursed Terrain.”

The ground shook with a rumbling boom as a nauseating level of evil drifted

in from the distance. The land was being polluted. The sky stagnated and the earth decayed.

Everything alive in the land was cursed, while those of the darkness were blessed. This was the moment when Mynoghra's highly esteemed Military Magic was first used in real combat.

"What is this...?!"

"Let's just call it a...state secret. In any case, we don't have the time to talk at length about such things."

Elder Moltar's subordinates gathered around him when he raised his hand. As he said, there was little time for idle chitchat now that the battle had begun. Antelise could hear an altogether different kind of monstrous roar on the gusts of rotten wind blowing her way.

"I'm heading out with my subordinates to offer backup. Please send a runner if anything comes up. Until later."

Antelise couldn't get a word in edgewise before Elder Moltar left like the wind.

As far as she understood it, the Barbarian horde boasted overwhelming numbers. Although she knew Atou was strong, she doubted the young woman could take a horde on alone. But then Antelise recalled the crazy incident from the other day—she recalled the freakish monsters the twins brought as escorts on their first mission. She remembered how those monstrosities skinned Vesta's henchmen like they were playing dress-up.

The words Caria, the girl who'd comforted Antelise in her state of panic, had said stuck with her to this day. She said that those birdmen were Medics. Their primary purpose was to heal sick or injured soldiers, not fight.

If monsters that embodied terror were simply Medics in Mynoghra, then what kind of abomination was their Hero?

Mynoghra, the country where monsters with terrifying power reside. Just how powerful of a being would be revered as the Hero of the King of Ruin's people?

And here Antelise thought she was finally starting to become desensitized to the craziness that was Mynoghra. Realizing she'd barely scratched the surface when it came to understanding them, Antelise was so dumbstruck that her mouth fell open and she forgot to give orders.

The angry roar in the distance grew even louder. She could tell two enormously powerful forces were clashing even from this distance.

The sky and ground were rotten, and the Elementals were quaking with fear.

It was there, in that noxious space, where the powerful weapon Mynoghra revered as a Hero was wielding her strength. There she took on an entire army all alone as if it were the natural course of things.

"Is this...is this the real Mynoghra?"

Mayor Antelise could only mutter those stunned words.



A monster had appeared.

"OOOOOOOooooooooohhh!!"

Ice Rock's battle-axe struck the ground, sending broken stone fragments at Atou like sharpened bullets. Atou dodged his attack with the grace of an acrobat and eyed him with an amused smile as she methodically swung her Holy Sword.

I see. So he's a melee boss, eh?

Atou calmly analyzed her opponent as her whipping tentacles helped her maintain a safe distance from him.

How do his stats translate into Strength? He's from an RPG, so he must operate under completely different mechanics and power balancing. Any misstep in my assessment of him here will cost me. That much is certain.

But Atou was up against a character from a game with an emphasis on one-on-one combat. She was on a decidedly different scale from him as a character designed for military-scale combat. In fact, Takuto's explanation before the battle proved to be truer by the minute.

The Holy Sword she spun in a circle effortlessly deflected the battle-axe's cranium-smashing blows. His redirected battle-axe sliced through the air and slammed into the ground as she danced away from his relentless strikes. At first glance, it seemed as if Atou was only defending against Ice Rock's attacks, but reality proved far crueler than that.

"GYAAAGH!"

"URGGH!"

"PGYAH!"

While Ice Rock was trying to smash the dancing Atou with his axe, countless tentacles sprouted from her back. He prepared for them to attack him, but they instead shot out at lightning speed to take down his subordinates watching at a distance. Clicking his tongue, he sliced off the tentacles to stop her from killing his troops, but Atou took that opening to thrust her sword at him, forcing him to quickly shift his battle-axe back to defend himself.

Grr! This wench's keeping me rooted here! Ice Rock groaned internally. He understood exactly what his opponent was doing.

Ice Rock was currently the only member of the Phon'kaven Conquest Army with overwhelming combat strength. Put another way, aside from him and his few demon subordinates, the army was made up of squishy monsters that would scatter without a leader. Pinning him down here would put his army at an immediate disadvantage.

Monsters that act on instinct aren't suited to military action. They don't even possess the basic intelligence to think and act on their own. An army of monsters without a commander is weaker than even a pack of wild beasts. Thus, the best way to take them down is to take out the brains of the operation.

However, Ice Rock was confident enough in his own ability to know that that was easier said than done. And that was exactly why he felt threatened by Atou, who was pulling that feat off alone.

"Gutless coward! Fight me fair and square!"

"Haha! Are those really the words of the Demon Lord's general? Please don't make me laugh too much. I would hate to swing and miss."

Atou didn't fall for his petty provocation. She was both physically and mentally not a good match for Ice Rock.

...I don't have many demons here. I must prevent their loss at all costs. Panic started to show on his face of ice.

Meanwhile, Atou also understood the nature of the Demon Lord's Army and prioritized eliminating the intelligent demons. The battlefield was currently Cursed Terrain due to wide-scale Ruin Magic. She just had to eliminate the demons, then all that would be left was cleaning up the weakened neutral monsters, which would be easy work for the strengthened Long-legged Bugs and Elder Moltar's Dark Elf squad.

The only element of concern was the enemy demons, who were strengthened by the Cursed Terrain, but they were successfully pinned down by Atou per Takuto's orders.

Atou snickered to herself as she felt great respect for Takuto's highly effective strategy despite their lack of time to prepare. If things kept going this way, she'd effectively carry out his strategy.

But Ice Rock was a high-ranking demon who bore the title and responsibilities of one of the Four Generals of the Demon Lord's Army. He wasn't going to let things end this easily.

"Frostfangs! Come!"

Werewolves with bodies of ice and silver fur appeared out of nowhere at Ice Rock's call. Unusually long tongues extended from their blood-red maws, and their jagged, sharp teeth and steel-like claws set them apart from the other monsters on the field.

Interesting. I take it that's a play on the Infinite Summons skill bosses tend to have? Atou thought. *What an annoyingly RPG-like ability.*

The summoned Frostfangs leaped at Atou from all directions. She calmly redirected her tentacles from mowing down the nearby demons to intercepting their attack.

A considerable amount of time had passed since her battle with Qualia's Paladins. In addition to Hero units from *Eternal Nations* leveling up over time,

Atou had also plundered various skills from her enemies. It was only after being strengthened by his Holy Sword Artes that the High Paladin, renowned for his unparalleled strength, was just barely able to chop off one of Atou's tentacles. Measly summoned monsters, even those summoned by one of the Demon Lord's generals, stood no chance against multiple tentacles.

“RAAAUGGHH! YIIP!”

Tentacles stronger than steel pierced right through the Frostfang's tough hide, ending its life in a single strike. Atou sensed something was amiss as she watched the monster vanish into a gold coin.

That's weird... Only two take part in the same battle?

Ice Rock had summoned a total of five Frostfangs. She'd just skewered one to death, so there were four left. But, strangely enough, only two ever stayed within combat range of her. When one was destroyed, the other jumped in to replace it.

They fight exactly the way they do in their game.

Just as Atou was limited to the parameters of a 4x turn-based strategy game, the enemies before her seemed equally bound to the rules governing the role-playing game they originated from.

Game characters are being sent to another world...and from completely different games, at that.

Although she was suspicious about what was going on, Atou concentrated on the enemy in front of her as that took precedence. She was in the middle of a fight, after all. Not even she felt confident enough about her fare in this battle to connect telepathically with Takuto for a lengthy talk about what was going on.

“Why're ye getting in our way?! Aren't ye of the darkness as well? Lay down yer blade and offer allegiance to our Demon Lord so that we can conquer the world together!” Ice Rock tried to sway Atou even as he brandished his battle-axe at her.

He just couldn't understand why she would be their enemy when she was so powerful and so like them. His invitation was also secretly a plea because he

was beginning to sense his defeat was nigh.

But Sludge Atou of *Eternal Nations* was indifferent to his overture when she'd already experienced conquering the world and leading it to ruin more times than there were stars in the sky.

A blank look fell over her face as if he'd just spoken to her in a foreign language.

"Ah, you're after world domination?"

"Most unequivocally. We're going to create a world for demons. We'll eradicate humanity and make our name ubiquitous in this land. The glorious and prosperous age of darkness shall *come!*"

Ice Rock spoke passionately as if he were reciting a speech. He was completely open to attack, and Atou's tentacle could easily pierce his ice cranium if she struck now.

Isn't it considered taboo to attack a character during a transformation scene or a lengthy speech when it comes to RPGs? Atou thought and decided to kindly reply to him instead of cutting his talk short by killing him then and there.

"I can understand the temptation, but what will you do after you conquer the world?"

Ice Rock's brain froze with that unexpected query.

Atou sighed at his reaction and expanded on her question like she was talking to an imbecile.

"As it is, I'm already buried under a tiresome mountain of work, you know? I'm even giving up my precious time with my king to get a handle on everything. This is how bad it is just running one smallish empire... And what, you want the whole freakin' world? Do you like administrative work **THAT** much?" she asked.

World domination was a lofty ideal, and Atou could understand it as a means to an end. Building your own ideal world after exterminating all your enemies isn't that strange of a goal, and it's a kind of utopia many leaders have dreamed of. Atou had of course achieved that very thing with Takuto on countless occasions.

But world conquest was always the means to an end—not the actual end itself.

What do you gain after you conquer the world?

What will you do after that?

Those were the things that mattered more the conquering itself.

But Ice Rock had a hard time answering her. He'd never actually given any real thought to what came after world domination aside from vague, theatrical notions of how it should be. He desperately racked his brain for an answer until he realized he had none whatsoever.

“Hmm? Could it be your character backstory is so shallow that your thoughts and actions default to the most simpleminded ones?” Atou said with a contemptuous look when he failed to answer her. “Well, I guess most RPG bosses don't get any more storyline after you defeat them, do they? You poor thing.”

Brave Questers is an old-school, trope-laden JRPG. Often cited as the first computer RPG, it has a long history that has seen it remade with every new video game console. Although every remake gets some new features, the story tends to faithfully follow the original's core layout and conventions.

The story is always incredibly simple, likely to feed off of player nostalgia, making it the complete opposite type of game from *Eternal Nations*, which adds depth to its game world with vast amounts of flavor text.

Thus, Frost General Ice Rock's flavor text was limited to nothing more than just “A melee boss with a warrior's spirit.”

“What's this nonsense ye speak *of*?! What're ye trying to *say*?!” Ice Rock shouted. All he could do was shout.

He couldn't comprehend even half of what the girl was saying, but what he did understand was that it was lethal to him. Burning unease consumed him like a wildfire. His heart of ice accelerated as if to drive home that uneasiness, and frigid white air poured off his body in the place of sweat.

Atou exhaled another long-long-suffering sigh upon witnessing his mounting

panic.

“You’re...even stupider than I thought.”

“What did ye just say to *me*?!”

The weighty battle-axe’s edge gleamed as it moved up and swept down. Following the trajectory of that storm-like strike with both eyes, Atou spun her sword once and sliced upward, meeting the blow head-on. Sparks flew as metal clashed against metal.

Utter shock widened Ice Rock’s cold eyes, and Atou flashed a wicked smile.

When Atou snatched the Holy Sword Artes from the veteran High Paladin, she also obtained his Observing Eye skill, which allowed her to roughly grasp the skill and strength of her opponent after crossing blades only once. However, this only acted as a final confirmation of her opponent’s ability. She’d already figured out what he was made of from their initial confrontation.

In other words, he was easily managed at this level.

Atou determined that while he was indeed stronger than the Paladins she’d fought before, he wasn’t much of a threat to her now.

“Holy Sword Artes are a god-tier skill Qualia’s made-up god created to eradicate evil pests like you. What do you think? Frightening just to look at, isn’t it?” she taunted.

“Ghh! How can a demon like ye wield such a *skill*?! Did ye become God’s *bitch*?!”

“No, the gods have nothing to do with technology trees. This is just one of many skills up for the taking.”

Atou had a very cut-and-dry manner of thinking. Takuto always came first and foremost. Everything else, whether it be supernatural or otherwise, held little interest to her. Thus, she’d enthusiastically make use of whatever technology and skills she could without caring whether it originated from holy gods or debase demons. This was why she could interact with the Dark Elves without conflict and make the most of the Holy Sword Artes.

Everything was for Takuto.

However, her diamond-like conviction and indifference toward everything and everyone rubbed Ice Rock the wrong way.

A frigid blizzard sharp enough to tear the skin apart shot out from the Frostfang's maw as if it were trying to cut into their conversation. Atou spun elegantly out of the way and sent a single tentacle straight through the Frostfang's open mouth. A gold coin flopped onto the cold ground with a sad clang that rang throughout the battlefield.

They may be easy fodder, but there's a lot of them. A drawn-out battle will put too great a burden on the Long-legged Bugs and Defense Force. I can't take things the fun and slow way, Atou thought.

The Long-legged Bugs received massive buffs from the Cursed Terrain and Isla's passive skills. Low-leveled monsters might not hold a candle to them, but they were still just Scout units. The risk of taking damage and getting destroyed increased the longer the battle dragged on.

A battle of attrition would be even harder on Dragontan's Defense Force and Elder Moltar's Dark Elf troops. Although they were primarily using long-ranged attacks from the baileys, they'd eventually need to take to the field to get rid of the monsters littering the town's perimeter. And when they did clash, the differences in latent Strength between Humanoid races and monsters would make for a hard fight.

Atou finally decided to annihilate Ice Rock. Now that she'd seen what he was made of mentally and physically, she doubted his destruction would lead to any disadvantageous circumstances. She switched her grip on the Holy Sword, completely changing the aura she gave off.

"You said there's a Demon Lord, yes?" she asked.

She'd already wiped out the last of the Frostfangs. She'd taken care of them while having that lengthy conversation with Ice Rock.

There was a set cool-down time before Ice Rock could summon more, and that was by no means a short amount of time when it came to an active battlefield. He was on course to being completely crushed. He couldn't even use the Frostfangs as bait to aid his escape anymore.

Ice Rock regretted the careless misstep that led him to underestimate his opponent's strength based on appearances. He needed to request the assistance of all the generals—nay, even the Demon Lord's presence may be necessary to deal with his current foe.

His thoughts went to the wretched Hero who'd thoroughly annihilated the Demon Lord's Army and eventually drove their blade through the Demon Lord's heart. And then there was the evil girl Atou, who attacked regardless of his attempts at persuasion. The Hero and the girl were completely different in appearance and disposition, yet...they seemed eerily similar enough in Ice Rock's eyes.

"Why are your people trying to conquer the world? Out of instinct? Or of your own volition? Have you ever wondered why a hero always stands in your way?"

A beguiling voice gnawed at Ice Rock as if it were burrowing into his core and chiseling chunks out of his cold heart. Every fiber of his being screamed out in instinctual warning, but his body felt as heavy as lead.

"A hero appears over and over again, bringing about your ruin every time. The same thing repeats endless—"

"SILENCE! SILENCE! SILENCE!"

Ice Rock screamed. He screamed like a pathetic creature. He'd lost his presence of mind in a way most unbecoming for one of the Four Generals who served the Demon Lord, but fortunately and unfortunately, he no longer had any intelligent subordinates left to witness his shame.

"You've realized it, haven't you? You can't not have realized it by now. If you are like us, then you should have all the memories. Oooh! That expression! I love it! So that's what an evil monster that attacks humanity and heroes looks like when it's in despair! Pure perfection!"

It only took one or two spins for the girl to effortlessly repel Ice Rock's madly swinging battle-axe.

Atou was laughing. Laughing at the foe before her. After all, the puniness of this pitiful creature only served to prove how great and mighty she and, by extension, her king was...

“What is it ye want from *me*?! What the demi-hell are ye trying to *say*?!”

“You are nothing more than a minor boss character from a video game,” she stated.

Ice Rock remembered everything.

He remembered he was nothing more than a pawn. He remembered how he’d thought he should fight the Hero with the other generals. How he’d thought they should go kill the Hero in the Starter Town before the Hero had a chance to accumulate any strength. And yet, before he knew it, he was always facing the Hero in the exact same spot as the last time and the time before that.

Despite thinking up many different ways to turn the tides, everything always ended before he could act on it.

No matter how many times things repeated...no matter how many redoes he got...the end always came with his annihilation without him ever reaching the Hero first...

Yes, in this very moment, Ice Rock remembered everything and realized he was nothing more than a single obstacle meant to be cleared on the way to the end of a video game called *Brave Questers*.

“Your fear is palpable... Did you know that, pride of the Demon Lord’s Four Generals?”

“OOOOOOOooooooooohhh!!”

His cry was no longer the majestic roar of a brave warrior but rather the sorrowful wailing of a beast.

As she watched him go through the motions, Sludge Atou sneered like she was having the time of her life.

Tears of red blood flowed from his icy eyes.

His was the anguished and despairing expression of someone who’d realized they were nothing more than puppets on a string without any freedom of their own. Atou’s face twisted with sheer delight as she enjoyed every bit of his wailing, suffering, misery, and meltdown. She wanted to egg him on to further bathe in his anguish.

The girl who showed absolute trust and devotion to Takuto to the point that fanatical couldn't even begin to describe it...was utterly evil when it came to others, even if they were characters from a game world like her.

"Then it can start *now*! Everything can start from *here*! World domination in the truest sense will begin for us *today*! This time...this time for sure...we will be the victors!"

The battlefield consisted of Atou, Ice Rock, and a treasure-trove worth of gold coins gleaming on the ground.

Frost General Ice Rock of the Demon Lord's Four Generals had lost all his direct subordinates and was on course to lose sight of his very reason for existing. But just as Takuto was Atou's reason for existing, Ice Rock also found his self-worth in another.

"O Demon Lord! Our great overlord! I offer ye true victory *today*! My name is Frost General Ice Rock! The one who crushes all enemies!"

Ice Rock experienced a sudden morale boost. In RPG terms, he didn't receive any changes to his immediate stats, but he had pumped himself up to be a proud warrior with the will to move forward. Unfortunately for him, Atou sneered at the first real resolve he had found since being teleported to this new world.

"Ahahahahaha! What a riot! You amuse me, you really do! Do you honestly believe that level of awareness, that level of resolve, that level of power is enough to proclaim you can defeat me? Sludge Atou? That you can shout to the heavens that you will take over the world?! Ha!"

She laughed and laughed and laughed until tears formed in her crimson eyes.

Ice Rock trembled as he realized she viewed his noble determination as less than rubbish tossed out on the wayside.

She was the embodiment of pure evil.

Ice Rock's feelings and resolve meant nothing to the girl who only saw value in Takuto and herself.

Just as humans and animals can't converse...

Just as animals and bugs can't converse...

Just as bugs and rocks can't converse...

Atou was incapable of truly understanding anyone other than Takuto.

"In that case, I'll deny *all* of you! I'll destroy everything you believe in! My name is Sludge Atou! There can only be one sovereign in this world, and that is my master, Takuto Ira!"

That was what it meant to be Mynoghra's Hero. That was what it meant to be Sludge Atou.

And so began the first and final battle between them.

Ice Rock's pride and ego were on the line for the first time with this fight.

He freely wielded his ice battle-axe, striking at her from overhead, the ground shaking with the power behind his attack. Atou bent her tentacles out of the way like living whips and effortlessly parried his first strike with the Holy Sword. Then she thrust out with the blessed blade in a counterstrike.

Half-frozen gravel shot out at Atou like machine-gun fire from where Ice Rock had slammed his foot on the ground. She nimbly manipulated her tentacles out of the ground to deflect and repel the gravel bullets with inhuman agility.

It was like a mythical battle spoken of only in legends was unfolding there on the battlefield with their inhuman display of attacking and defending at unimaginable speeds.

The solid ground was torn up from the shockwaves and the sky constantly shook with the impact of each attack. That turbulence reached the town of Dragonton in the distance, and everyone who watched this battle that exceeded human understanding felt their very soul shudder.

"It won't *end*! I won't let things end this *way*! Even if I perish here, I will get my revenge on ye!"

"Ahahaha! What the heck?! What kinda cliché line is that?! You sound just like a manga protagonist's party member! Are you trying to get this battle illustrated in the color character pages?!"

Atou cackled. Malice seeped from her every word.



Mynoghra is set as the vilest civilization within *Eternal Nations*. And that was exactly why there was no way its Hero unit, Atou, wouldn't delight in trampling the hopes and dreams of another under her foot after spitting all over it.

"Tell me! Tell me! Tell *ME*! Tell me how you will recover from this?! How are you going to defeat me?! C'mon, tell me! No matter how you look at it, you're screeeeewedddddddd!!!"

Ice Rock neither had the leeway to strike back to see if it was impossible for him to regain ground nor to laugh off her taunting as nonsense. In a situation where he was so close to losing, he couldn't even bluff, he still wielded his full strength to fulfill his reason for existing.

However, a very sad reality hung over this battle.

Role-playing game monsters typically have fixed action patterns. They're from a video game, after all. Several different behavior patterns are generally sufficient for most players to enjoy the game. On the opposite hand, too many programmed actions tend to create bugs and errors that only confuse the player and reduce a game's playability.

When it came down to it, Ice Rock's fighting style was so one-note that it was far too easy to predict his next move.

"I already know your every move, ice cube! *Ahahahahaha!*"

Atou slid in close to Ice Rock as if she'd already predicted he was about to swing his battle-axe down from above. He hurriedly slammed the axe into the ground, unleashing the next wave of gravel bullets, but Atou dropped to the earth like a snake and avoided the attack entirely as if she'd known it was coming next.

If this were a game, then all of Ice Rock's attacks would have come up as null against Atou.

On her turn, Atou's attack finally struck his icy torso.

"CRITICAL HIIIIITTTT!! Whoopsie! Whatever shall we do now?! I did way more damage to you than I expected! Are you all right, ice cube?! How much HP do you have left? Soooo sorry, I don't have a game guide on me, so I don't know

how much of a weakling you are!!!”

His large arm hit the ground with a thud. Although he’d managed to block a blow to the gut, he lost one arm in the process.

Ice Rock’s battle-axe only manifested its true strength when wielded with two hands. Now that he only had one hand, its attack power was cut in half.

He couldn’t land a hit even when he had his full strength. Would he be able to deflect her attacks with just one arm now? Ice Rock’s face of ice distorted with despair.

The scales of battle already leaned heavily in Atou’s favor. But she refrained from recklessly pursuing him. Cutting him with her words posed no risk to her, but careless attacks could give him the opening he needed to strike back.

Even with all her sadistic remarks meant to torment the weak, she was in enough control of her emotions to never underestimate an opponent.

Was this calm thinking brought about by her nature as a Hero unit or simply because an evil soul allows no mistakes?

The one sure thing was that Ice Rock’s slim chance of winning was slowly but surely being hacked away. And yet he still put up a fight. He decided, a little too late, to unleash his Ultimate Attack.

“URAAAAAAAAAH! Have a taste of my Ultimate Attack!”

Frigid air poured off Ice Rock’s body. It spread like an explosion from his core, instantly freezing their surroundings as if they were in subzero temperatures. The handle of his battle-axe creaked. Ice Rock forced enough power through his crouched body that it threatened to break his weapon as his frame swelled to show off his mounting strength.

A faint, sadistic smile spread across Atou’s lips as she quietly braced herself. All her tentacles instantly gathered around the Holy Sword and turned into a giant spiral spear.

“Come. Challenge me with what you believe to be your greatest skill and taste miserable defeat.”

Her words and behavior did nothing to conceal her wickedness. Her intent to

kill him with the next attack overflowed from every cell of her petite body and the spirally swirling spear of tentacles increased their hardness to emphasize her words.

And then came the clichéd final struggle that always surrounds the unleashing of an Ultimate Attack.

“URAAAAAAAAAH! Glacial Decapitation!”

Offense and defense happened in a single instant, but the time included in that instant seemed endless to both sides.

Subzero air exploded from Ice Rock’s body in waves that assailed Atou like a blizzard, encasing her delicate skin in thin ice. Frozen soil crawled over the ground like a living creature and froze her ankles in place.

Amid the intense cold that shreds skin and makes all living things close their eyes and die, Atou looked forward, unfazed. Her eyes were fixed on the ice battle-axe swinging toward her.

Ice Rock’s do-or-die Ultimate Attack was nothing more than a slightly chillier attack than usual to Atou.

“Ahaha! *AHAHAHA*! How you underestimate me! You thought you could seal my movements with a little ice—”

Something strange happened then.

Just as Atou readied her specialized weapon to mow down his axe with impeccable timing—in that one-millionth of a second before their blades would clash—she failed to defend against an attack she never should have failed to counter.

“Wha?!”

Her legs wouldn’t move.

Yes, her feet were undeniably frozen to the ground with ice. But Atou wasn’t so weak that a measly layer of ice could immobilize her.

It *wasn’t* the ice.

Something else...some strange, invisible force kept her feet stuck in place.

No, not just her feet...her entire body refused to react to Ice Rock's attack.

"GAH! *Urrph!!*"

The brief exchange of offensive and defensive blows ended with Atou on her knees.

She should've been on a whole different level from her opponent. The attack she'd unleashed with all her might had several times the Strength of her enemy, and the timing was perfect. If things went as usual, she should've dodged his attack and dealt a fatal blow to Ice Rock with her counterattack.

Her counter had been blocked and she even allowed him to land a hit on her.

Atou's crimson eyes spread wide with astonishment and darted around to quickly grasp and piece together the current situation.

It appeared that the recoil from Ice Rock's Ultimate Attack had temporarily immobilized him. The ice covering Atou's body shattered with a loud crack.

She could move. Her mind was sound. She couldn't detect any traces of a mental attack.

Something had happened. Something she'd never experienced before. She'd been attacked in some way.

Her combat senses as Mynoghra's Hero led her to one answer.

...Tch! Impossible! He just used an Unmissable Move, didn't he?!

A bone-shattering impact unlike anything she'd ever experienced before overcame Atou. The temporary lull in the passage of time during her moment of quick thinking ended, and her body suffered from the very blow her mind had just processed.

Mynoghra's Heroes are a force of nature with the ability to take on whole armies alone. But that didn't mean they never took damage. Moreover, that last attack was entirely unexpected, and the damage done to her was immeasurable. She would've been in a worse state if she hadn't snatched the Stone Golem's defense strengthening skill: Stone Skin.

After taking a brief moment to be grateful for her luck, Atou started to analyze the situation in a way that let her internally gripe about it too.

An Unmissable Move is an attack that can't miss, be countered, or intercepted! That's what just happened, isn't it?! Just like how everything I do is governed by 4x strategy game rules, he's governed by RPG rules, isn't he?! Having the very game system make your attack impossible to counter is just plain cheating!!!

Atou's internal organs spilled out of the ginormous gash sweeping up from her abdomen to her chest.

Finally freed from the aftereffects of his Ultimate Attack, Ice Rock turned toward Atou, and his expression stiffened. No living creature can spill its gizzards and still be okay. That would be a fatal blow even to a demon like Ice Rock.

Ice Rock had found a sliver of hope when he'd landed an actual blow on her—something he thought was impossible. However, something changed in the viscera that streamed out of her.

Her internal organs, which had gushed out of her with a pool of bright red blood—a color unbecoming of an evil being—gradually turned jet-black. It eventually became muddy sludge and absorbed back into Atou from her feet.

Before he knew it, Sludge Atou was standing before him as if she'd never been injured...

"I'd appreciate it if you didn't underestimate me so much."

"N-Not even that was enough to defeat ye...?"

It's my turn. Atou pierced Ice Rock with a killer glare.

In turn-based RPGs and strategy games, players typically get their turn after their enemy's turn ends. Both sides were operating under different game rules, which were bound to cause various anomalies in the battle mechanics, but Atou figured he'd be incapable of dealing another fatal counterattack immediately after unleashing his Ultimate Attack.

So she poised her tentacles to attack again. The spiral-shaped feelers let out a strange *gichigichi* noise as they charged up, almost as if they were letting their prey know it was their time to strike back.

Then, like a bow being drawn to its absolute limit—

“Die... *Die* with an amusing sound just like the corny RPG boss you are!!”

—Atou released her fully charged attack.

“All hail...the *Demon L*—”

All that remained was Ice Rock vanishing into glittering particles of light. Then, as if the world remembered it as an afterthought, a treasure-trove worth of gold coins rained down in the same spot.

Atou glanced at that spot as if looking down on trivial filth and huffed.

“There is only one true sovereign in this world. Our king, Takuto Ira! Ruin shall come equally to all who oppose him! Be they good or evil, all who refuse to bow before our king aren’t allowed to exist!”

Tentacles burst out in every direction at explosive speeds. A force that should be too powerful for an individual to wield assailed the monsters remaining on the battlefield.

With the range of a longbow, the explosive strength of a giant, and ruthlessness with no room for mercy, those tentacles lashed out at every last monster under Ice Rock’s command.



“...**AND** that’s the end of the monster horde.”

It only took a few minutes.

With the loss of their general, the monsters couldn’t fight against their instincts that screamed they were doomed, and they immediately began to scatter in every direction like baby spiders. Dragontan’s Defense Force and Mynoghra’s troops had sustained some minor damage but were doing well overall despite Atou’s initial concerns.

As for Mynoghra’s Hero herself, she could be trampled by ten thousand monsters and come out the other side unscathed. The same couldn’t be said of squishy Humanoids. Fortunately, they’d prepared for the worst-case scenario involving personnel and structural damage, so Atou was relieved things weren’t worse.

“The monsters are retreating, eh? It makes sense with the loss of their commander, but it’s fortunate their panic didn’t send them charging straight into the town,” Atou mumbled to herself as she pressed a hand over her abdomen.

A dull, stabbing pain aggravated her pride.

Pain meant little to a Hero born to wage war, but the mere fact the wound was the result of her carelessness was the greatest humiliation she’d ever tasted, and it enraged her to the point her anger became palpable.

“This is the state I’m left in after I was being so cautious too. What a failure... I’m such a *failure*! How can I declare myself Mynoghra’s Hero—King Takuto’s Hero—when I’m like this?!”

Atou audibly gnashed her teeth and fixed her gaze forward. The RPG’s main forces were likely waiting in the direction the monsters ran toward.

“Confronting a completely different game makes things tricky. They’re too unpredictable because they move according to entirely different rules from us.”

Atou put her brain in high gear to analyze and pick apart the current situation.

She’d always believed that this world they’d been transferred to was governed by 4x strategy game rules just like her and Mynoghra. But she needed to alter her thinking now that an enemy army had arrived from a role-playing game. She now believed it was too dangerous to draw conclusions with her lack of knowledge.

Her beloved king instantly came to mind.

Should she report back what had just happened? Would he be terribly disappointed to learn she’d been injured? Of course, she understood that her king wasn’t so narrow-minded to be upset with her over such a thing. But she had really wanted to tell him that she had successfully completed her mission without any issues and receive his praise in return.

Takuto had given Atou a simple explanation about the game called *Brave Questers* shortly before the battle began. She could’ve predicted her opponent’s attack as long as she was paying closer attention. At the very least, she could’ve handled things better.

Nevertheless, what was done was done.

Boundless anger at herself ate away at her. She couldn't shake her regret and fear of relaying her failure. Then there was her absolute trust that her king wouldn't scold her for it. But her heart longed for those invaluable words of praise.

Various thoughts and painful emotions spun around in her head, driving her into the proverbial corner.

"Aahhh! Enough!!!!"

She finally let it all out in a loud shout and shook her head.

There was still so much left to do. She didn't have time to spare worrying herself sick.

When she finally looked up, she confirmed the Long-legged Bugs were waiting on standby around her. They likely came for their next orders after the monsters they were fighting fled the field.

"Long-legged Bugs! Thin out the defeated army within range and earn experience points! King Takuto will give you an upgrade later if you do!"

"GYGYEE!!"

The Long-legged Bugs zoomed off in the direction the monsters had fled at terrifying speeds. Since they'd earned a lot of experience points during this defense mission, they were ready to be upgraded into more powerful units through the Upgrade System.

The loser loses everything while the victor gains it all.

Acquiring higher-ranking units at this stage in the game was a very beneficial achievement for the empire of Mynoghra.

"I'd like to pursue the enemy now too, but...what should I do? No, enough procrastinating, I should report back to King Takuto first."

Atou also needed to give orders to Elder Moltar and the rest of the troops from Mynoghra. Most of all, she still hadn't spoken to Takuto yet.

Recklessly pursuing the enemy without handling priority matters first would

be a disgrace to her role as mission commander, much less as a Hero.

With that in mind, Atou sucked in a deep breath to calm herself and connected to Takuto's mental channel to send him a telepathic message. Her inaudible voice sounded so much like an adorable young lady it belied the crazed madwoman taunting voice she'd used during her battle with Ice Rock.

"King Takuto! I have successfully completed the Defend Dragontan Mission. One of the Demon Lord's Four Generals advanced on the town with his army, but I have successfully crushed them. It was a piece of cake with my strength. However...um...you see...I kinda let down my guard, I guess? I have some things to report later, but um...before I do...I was kinda hoping you could praise me for all my hard work away from home...hahaha..."

Fidgeting shyly, Atou began to relay her message while looking into the distance where her king was. Did she bow several times in his direction because she'd picked up that Japanese habit from Takuto? But the adorable sunflower-like smile on her face instantly wilted.

"...What?"

In less than a fraction of a second, her expression shifted from a girl in love to the Hero of an evil civilization.

"Enemy forces have invaded Mynoghra's inner citadel."

The brief report Takuto had shared with her was enough to chill Atou's heart.

Demon Lord's Army

In the Brave Questers series, the Demon Lord's Army usually refers to the enemy army in the first Brave Questers game. Given that the game was released relatively early in video game history, the enemy army has a fairly simple set up. Four General boss monsters serve under the Demon Lord—the last boss—and their goal is world domination. The game never touched on any other flavor text aside from that.

- **Last Boss**

Demon Lord

- **Four Generals**

Flame Demon Flamin / Machine Phantom Old Mechanic / Cursed Dancer Lady Wind / Frost General Ice Rock

Chapter 3: Surprise Attack

“**WHAT** a big fat pain... I should’ve planned for the unforeseeable.”

Isla silently tried to guess what her master was thinking based on his muttered words.

It all started with the Barbarians plaguing their ally nation, Phon’kaven. Their sporadic raids had suddenly turned into a huge horde bearing down on them. And if that wasn’t bad enough, they originated from an entirely different game.

It was foolish to apply common sense or typical tactics to this situation, but there was too little to go off at this point to make an appropriate judgment call. And their enemy wasn’t going to wait for them to make their move.

Enemy forces were currently marching closer to the heart of Mynoghra, its imperial capital, threatening their peaceful way of life. They were in a dire situation, if there ever was one.

“Indeed, we never expected them to discover our location so soon... It’s only a matter of time before we clash. However, taking the initiative and striking the Demon Lord’s Army was a wise first move, my master.”

Isla casually tried to sound out the reason for her master’s decision. She thought Takuto’s military orders were a tad hasty, regardless of the results. She understood speed was of the essence when dealing with an enemy with so many unknowns. She also understood the need to defend Dragontan from attack until the bitter end.

What she could not wrap her head around was his decision to open hostilities at Dragontan before having a firm understanding of their opponent’s nature and origin. His decision had directly resulted in defeating one of the enemy generals and repelling enemy forces from Dragontan.

Isla believed he must’ve possessed some external information she did not that led him to make that judgment call, and she wished to know what it was.

“I guess...you could say that. But it was a botched operation since it ended with the enemy invading our main base.”

If memory served her right, Takuto was the cautious type. He was unique in his desire to put peace and Domestic Affairs first to the point he avoided conflict whenever possible. The Takuto Isla knew should've been so careful in his decision-making that he would've considered abandoning Dragontan if it benefited him.

So, why did someone like that fire the first shot?

That was the question that plagued her.

“I'm just glad that their strength was about what I'd expected. We should be able to handle the Demon Lord if his generals are all that weak,” Takuto muttered to himself.

The information from Atou's telepathic message fortunately gave them an approximate idea of the general makeup and strength of the Demon Lord's Army. They weren't in dire straits yet, and they now knew that they could get out of this pinch as long as they didn't botch their next move.

So, Isla locked eyes with Takuto, her concerns still needling away at her. She didn't know what calculations were being made behind those unreadable eyes of his, so she decided to come right out and openly address her suspicions.

“Forgive me for speaking out of turn, but I can't shake the idea that the leader of our enemy forces, the Demon Lord, might be a player like you. What are your thoughts on that, my master?”

Isla had one damning concern: were they up against another player like Takuto? If they were, then their foe's strength was incalculable. They might even be a veteran player on par with Takuto.

Just because he'd become Mynoghra's Commander in this world didn't mean it wouldn't be hard on Takuto to wage war against someone from his homeland. It didn't seem like a bad idea to change directions and call for a temporary truce to gather more information and probe what their opponent was really after, especially if they prepared for the potential fallout.

Isla had that in mind when she made her query, but she was completely off

the mark.

“The question you’ve got to ask yourself is: even if they are another player... another person from the same world...does that make them an automatic ally? It doesn’t, right?”

Isla sucked in a sharp breath at his casual dismissal. His words were punctuated by an invisible pressure that rejected any objections. His lips curved into a soft smile that didn’t reach his eyes.

What is my master thinking?

Not even Isla, a Hero who’d conquered many worlds alongside him, could get a read on Takuto. Perhaps he’d be more open with Atou, who he trusted more than anyone else, but she was unfortunately away defending Dragontan. And so, Isla showed her willingness to follow the king’s policies by wordlessly bowing her head.

She didn’t really have another option available to her. Even if she did, she had no intention of ever going against her king.

Just as the Dark elves felt a certain kind of dread and alienation toward Isla and Atou, Isla found herself standing in the same position when it came to the being known as Takuto Ira, and there was still much about him she didn’t comprehend.

“...Either way, our course of action is clear,” Takuto said firmly. “Whether we’re up against another player or something else entirely, rapprochement isn’t an option. We aren’t equipped to idly sit by and watch what move they make next, which leaves us with one option: to crush them with everything we have.”

“Yes, yes, indeed. It is exactly as you say, my master.”

Given their current situation, it was a waste of precious time to raise further doubts. Moreover, Mynoghra’s King Takuto had chosen this course of action. In which case, it was his subordinates’ job to carry out his will no matter what.

Isla completely changed her perspective on the matter, gave a big nod, and bowed in the way unique to Mynoghra’s vassals.

“Unnecessary hesitation has a way of coming back to bite you. One of the

keys to a successful strategy is not meaninglessly rehashing the details after you've already decided."

"You are absolutely right, my master."

Takuto ran several strategies through his head. He dug up old memories, traced through the countless battles he'd played, and considered the most effective and efficient strategy for the current situation. Of course, he'd already taken unknown factors into consideration too.

This wasn't the world of *Eternal Nations*. There was an ocean of unknowns and even more potential for things to go wrong.

Takuto felt his heart race with unexpected excitement at the prospect of it all. He found it kind of strange and exhilarating how much he was enjoying what should be a bad situation.



"**BAD** news, Your Majesty! Enemy troops are en route to Mynoghra's Imperial Capital!"

One of the Dark Elf runners stumbled into the Throne Room with a look of abject horror on his face. This was around the same time Takuto had settled on his next move and was beginning to send orders to the Warriors with his Commander skills. With his ability to grasp the whereabouts of every citizen, Takuto already knew about the invading forces the Warriors had discovered.

However, Warrior Captain Gia had sent a messenger just in case.

"**I know.**"

Entering the Throne Room without permission under normal circumstances was a criminal offense. But the situation being what it was, Takuto raised a hand to stop Isla from saying anything and briefly spoke to the messenger himself. Seeing the scared messenger sharply suck in a breath at his king's words, Takuto signaled Isla with his eyes.

Knowing exactly what her master wanted from that simple signal, Isla offered the man several words of praise for his work in a softer voice than usual, then gave him his next orders.

“His Majesty knows about the invading army. He has already sent orders to Captain Gia and the others himself. We will now leave the Palace and move to City Hall to take command of the situation. Hurry back to your station as well.”

“Yes, ma’am!”

The telepathic communication system between units out in the field and back at base was operating perfectly. *Eternal Nations’* Commander system, which allowed Takuto to grasp the situation surrounding each unit and give direct orders, made it possible for him to move his army like his own limbs. Warrior Captain Gia’s first response was satisfactory—he had gathered the Warriors to help the citizens evacuate and took up a basic defensive position before Takuto even gave the order.

The Brain Eaters’ ability to maintain public order was also working to Mynoghra’s advantage. It allowed them to quickly squash any chaos that might ensue from citizens panicking over the sudden evacuation.

Takuto was actually impressed that he possessed limbs that moved a hundred times better than in the game. He didn’t know how many units the enemy had, but they couldn’t bring a massive army into the Accursed Lands with its poor footing and low visibility. In addition to that, Forests buffed Dark Elves, and Cursed Terrain buffed every citizen of Mynoghra.

They were in a crisis, but not one they couldn’t overcome.

“Though I hate to admit it...”

“...It’s a fact that they got the drop on us,” Isla finished Takuto’s quiet utterance.

It’s considered the height of folly to let the enemy into your home base. If they were in the audience at an Esports tournament, booing would shake the stands. If someone were playing the game, they would chuck their controller around this point. Unfortunately, this was their reality, and that was precisely why Takuto was prepared to make the hard decisions.

“All right, why don’t we turn a disadvantageous situation to our advantage, eh?”

Their opponent likely didn’t know a thing about Takuto Ira—about the young

man who'd commanded Mynoghra and conquered Nightmare difficulty in *Eternal Nations*.

He sneered.

It was time to educate these fools about what it meant to go up against the man who broke records and set a precedent for the impossible.

Takuto quietly rose from his throne with an expression that lacked humanity.



MYNOGHRA'S Palace was built a slight distance from the city area where the Dark Elves resided. Takuto formed a strategy in his head as he walked down the simple paved road carved through the trees with Isla as his guard and escort.

"Let's run through what we have to work with. First, we have 100 Warriors under Gia's command. Their strength doesn't even compare to one of Mynoghra's units, but their morale is top-notch. And then we have 3 Brain Eaters, who're critically important for both offense and defense with their ability to heal and buff others."

"Don't forget about the Larva I've spawned," Isla added. "They're more meant for manual labor, but they should put up a decent fight with my buffs."

"How many total?"

"About 200. They can be split into four stacks."

"Now that's a reliable force. I can see why you're called Mynoghra's strongest Hero, Isla. Labor Larva generally have a Strength of 0. But your buffs boost them to 2 Strength, making them capable of defending our home base..."

Takuto glanced down at the level path beneath his feet.

A good amount of time had passed since he'd summoned Isla. The Labor Larva units she'd produced with her Breeder skill had already demonstrated their usefulness in construction and cultivating new land. While 2 Strength was on the weaker side, they could still be counted as a part of Mynoghra's military forces. They should be easily capable of squashing Goblins and would make for the perfect frontline assault troops to clear out the weaklings.

Isla was putting her dual abilities to spawn and buff to good use.

“We would’ve had a solid defense if I’d only spawned Combat Larva, too,” Isla lamented. “Disasters always strike at the worst time, don’t they?”

“It’s actually kind of a relief to think this is the worst it’ll get.”

They were definitely in a disastrous situation, but Takuto was encouraged by Isla’s presence. He would’ve been more melodramatic if he hadn’t summoned her in time. To him, Mynoghra’s Hero units were who he could rely on the most in this world, showing just how much the time he’d spent with them during his past life had stuck with him even after death.

“Yes, yes, you couldn’t be more right. Now then, my master, how’s Gia faring?”

Isla’s question spurred Takuto to switch gears and telepathically check on how things were faring domestically. He needed to use the cards he had on hand to win the round, given that Atou wouldn’t be able to make it back on time. He couldn’t overlook a single thing. One tiny mistake could become irrecoverable damage, eventually leading to his empire’s downfall.

“The situation in the city isn’t too bad,” Takuto said. “Non-combatants have been evacuated to the government buildings, and our soldiers have already taken up a simple defense formation to protect the city.”

“We also have the upper hand with bonuses from the Cursed Terrain and Forest Terrain, making it easy to defend and difficult to attack,” Isla added. “It would’ve been a perfect opportunity to earn some experience points if we had the time to properly prepare our forces and national power.”

The standard figure for a successful attack on a dug-in/fortified defender is 3:1. Thus, by a general rule of thumb, an attacker would require three times as many numbers as the defender, all other things being equal. This theory not only applied to *Eternal Nations* but was modified for the defender to have a greater advantage thanks to the various buffs granted by the fantasy game elements.

However, that only applies when the proper preparations are made.

In Mynoghra, where the national power and troops were still scarce, and even the construction of defensive facilities was postponed, it was hard to say that

the situation was optimistic, even though there were powerful terrain bonuses in their favor.

“Gia sent me a message...” Takuto said. “About 1,000 enemy troops have entered the Accursed Lands. Hmm, there’s definitely an enemy general leading the invasion, and we still don’t have a firm grasp on what the RPG monsters are capable of. This will be a tough fight if there ever was one.”

“But you’ve already thought up the perfect strategy, haven’t you, my great and talented master?” Isla queried, although she already knew everything she needed to. She knew her master had the answer to the problem despite the crisis they found themselves in.

If things went south and they felt the empire was at risk, they could just retreat toward Dragontan with the Dark Elves. They still didn’t have many citizens, and the Dark Elves should have enough of an advantage in the Forest to make a clean break for it. Moreover, joining up with Atou, Elder Moltar and the rest of the Mages under him, and Dragontan’s Defense Force would be the safest and most effective way to take out the enemy.

The capital might get burned to the ground, but the Accursed Lands were ripe with building supplies. The city was still in the development stage, so it’d be easy enough to get back to this point.

But Takuto’s decision was the opposite of retreat—he planned to repel the enemy. As it stood, he didn’t call Atou back to Mynoghra but ordered her to pursue the army that had tried to invade Dragontan. He was clearly hiding enough aces up his sleeve to be confident he could win.

Takuto grinned at her amusing question as if he were pleased she asked. Then he laid down the law.

“We’ve got Mana stored up for times like this. If their side can make monsters appear out of thin air like a cliched RPG, then it’s time for us to show them the true nature of a strategy game.”

“Hehehe. It’s fortunate that there’s no limit on how many units we can produce with Emergency Production. Being able to produce as many units as we want as long as we have Mana is quite the game-breaking rule in our favor, if I say so myself.”

Simply mentioning the word Mana cued Isla in on exactly what kind of tactics her master had in mind.

During normal gameplay, Emergency Production had a set cool-down period before you could use it again. But they had discovered through rigorous testing that no such restrictions existed in this world. With that in mind, the obvious tactic would be to mass-produce as many Long-legged Bugs—the cheapest units—as their Mana reserves allowed.

Buffed to 3 Strength by Isla's passive skill, the Long-legged Bug now boasted impressive stats that combined its new Strength with its high mobility and speed as a Scout unit. Plus, they made it easy to check on the state of things with their long-range vision.

After calculating how many Long-legged Bugs they could spawn with Mynoghra's Mana reserves, Isla determined that they could indeed overtake the enemy general if he showed up as she'd feared.

However...

"Isla, I hereby grant you all of Mynoghra's stored up Mana. Level up as much as you can and defeat all our enemies. This is an order."

For a moment, Isla's mouth fell open as if a mental attack had struck her. If she were Humanoid, she'd likely have a dumbfounded expression on her buggy face.

A moment later, her mind caught up to reality. What came next was a rush of sheer delight.

"Ha! *Hahaha! Ahahahaha!!* My, my, oh my! What a mean and spiteful person you are, master! I never imagined you would give me such an order!"

Isla figured it all out from that.

Takuto was essentially saying he'd leave this entire nightmare situation that involved wiping out the threat to Mynoghra's Imperial Capital...to Isla.

There had to have been a dozen other tactics he could've picked from, including mass-producing the Long-legged Bugs like Isla had considered. And yet he pushed those countless options aside...

King Takuto Ira had given her the order to do it.

What faith he had in her! What an honor it was! She could feel the tremendous trust he placed in her from every angle she viewed his order.

Takuto showed no signs of having made this decision out of the heat of the moment, a grim resolve, a philosophical stance, or some weird resolution. When you get right down to it, he made the decision because it was the obvious thing to do. That was all there was to it, and that fact filled Isla with great joy.

“You know that Atou has already defeated one of the enemy generals, right?” he asked. “I haven’t confirmed how it works yet, but be cautious of any attacks based on RPG mechanics.”

“*Hehehe*. Oh yeah, little Atou had the wool pulled over her eyes at the end there, didn’t she? Let me assure you that I, at least, won’t let your concerns become a reality, my master.”

“Ooh! That’s some big talk right there.”

“I’m only stating a fact. Yes, yes, you can bet your bottom dollar that this is a pure, unadulterated fact and not arrogance or pride speaking. I’m just saying how it is, pure and simple.”

Takuto silently nodded in response.

No sane player would dump all their Mana into leveling up a single unit during a normal game session. Doing so is incredibly inefficient, especially since Mana is needed for many things the same way Currency and Resources are, such as Upkeep, unit production, and research. That’s why every player in *Eternal Nations* carefully allocates their Mana while constantly monitoring it.

Takuto’s tactic ignored the usual way of doing things by investing everything in one go. It was even crazier to invest it all in leveling up a single Hero unit instead of using it for Emergency Production. The outcome would be an oddity, to say the least—whether it would have the same success as an early game unit rush or would end in utter failure was yet to be seen.

If Takuto was going to put his absolute trust in the Queen of Bugs, then she was the only one with the right to honorably live up to that trust. And it goes without saying that Isla was a Hero with the ability to meet his expectations.

“Isla.”

“Yes, my master. I can gain two Distinct Features with this level up. What abilities will you bequeath upon your humble servant?”

“Predation and Parasitic Eggs.”

Isla let out a high-pitched *gichigichi* laugh. It all made sense now. She knew exactly where Takuto was taking this battle and how he intended to show their enemies hell.

Hero units can gain more Distinct Features as they level up. Each Distinct Feature grants unique skills and status effects, strengthening already powerful units. Players can showcase their skills by skillfully selecting and managing the Distinct Features only Heroes can have.

Takuto’s choice was the most effective and vicious set Isla knew of.

“Did you know that that tactic was once dubbed by the players of *Eternal Nations* as the Bug Rush and was despised and feared by all?” Isla asked.

A *gichigichi* creaking hiss came from Isla’s insect body as it rattled. Her muscles bulged from the sudden level-ups and the new powers accompanying them. Her old exoskeleton began to split down her back, and she slowly slid out of the unneeded skin. Her new exoskeleton looked twice as deadly with unique patterning, visually showing that the power hidden within her had increased.

Takuto looked up at Isla with a hint of awe. Maybe he was moved by getting to witness one of his Heroes leveling up. Glee seemed to tinge his otherwise nebulous expression.

“Yeah, I know it well,” he answered. “I was one of the players who was *despised* for using it often, after all.”

Every drop of Mynoghra’s Mana was poured into Isla.

Isla, who’d grown into an entity worthy of having the nickname of Queen of the Unending Swarm, spread her wings wide and let out a mighty roar. Her bizarre cry echoed to every end of the Accursed Lands, inciting dread in all who heard it.

Mynoghra was ready to go.

Why are Heroes considered units that can turn the tides of battle and are the most trusted and hated by every player in *Eternal Nations*?

“Hehehe, then please accept this power that is the ultimate annihilation tactic belonging to Mynoghra and is where the name Queen of Bugs hails from.”

The time had come to make that reason clear.

Isla, Queen of Bugs

Combat Unit

Strength: 16 Move: 1

<<Evil>> <<Hero>>

<<Breeder>> <<Predation>>

<<Parasitic Eggs>>

※ This unit increases the Strength of all Bug units in the world by +2.

※ All Bug units that encounter this unit are immediately placed under the control of the empire Isla belongs to.



Description

~Every bug was birthed by her and filled this world. All the little children are still quietly waiting for Mother Isla's command.~

Isla is one of Mynoghra's Hero units. This unit's Distinct Traits include strengthening all Bug units and the production of units called Larva. Larva are characterized by their weak Strength and inability to level up, but this is balanced with their unique ability to carry out activities requiring heavy manual labor, such as clearing land. They can also work on farms and in mines to harvest Materials and Resources. It is possible to use large numbers of Larva to overrun or disrupt enemy territory, but they also prove helpful in enhancing an empire's productivity.

Chapter 4: Hidden Things

MONSTERS swarmed the forest on their way to destroy Mynoghra's capital. Their advance was anything but fast. As an army composed of creatures that didn't normally work together, their movements were incohesive, and the complicated, bumpy terrain further impeded their speed. They looked nothing like a marching army, to say the least. Only the demons serving Flamin correctly understood their task and, although they weren't accustomed to it, they endeavored to take command of the monsters.

"The big boss sure gave us a tall order sayin' we can't burn down the forest..." grumbled a broad-sword-wielding demon called Flame Knight, his flaming red hair fluttering in the wind over his equally fiery red robe.

A man with the exact same appearance nodded along with his sighed complaints. This man wielded a staff inlaid with jewels and was a magic-type demon known as Flame Mage.

The two demons gave orders to the meandering monsters as they complained about the slow pace and grew frustrated with the densely overgrown forestland.

"It'd be a walk in the flaming park if we just burnt it down. That's how we've always done it, so why's he makin' things more complicated than they need to be this time?"

Flamin had prepared about 1,000 troops to capture the city within these strange woods. One of the reasons he'd kept his invading army small was that the city they'd discovered inside wasn't much bigger than a village, but the biggest reason was that he was afraid their forces would be exposed.

"He said he doesn't want to get discovered. I mean, our boss has always had a thing for slinkin' around in the dark. He's probably goin' with a sneaky plan this time too."

“He’ll roast you up if you say that to his face, y’know?”

“That’s why I’m sayin’ it when he’s not around, smartass.”

After glancing over his shoulder at the unintelligent monsters—mostly Goblins, Orcs, and like—trudging behind them, Flame Knight turned to his companion.

Their boss—Blazing General Flamin of the Demon Lord’s Four Generals—was a cunning and ruthless man. If that wasn’t bad enough, he was a hard-to-please, hot-tempered boss.

While the demons were too talented to be easily offed, they still needed to tread carefully not to earn his wrath. They put up with a lot of stress treading on thin ice around him daily. Being able to toss their complaints back and forth without him breathing down their back like this was their way of relieving stress. Although their boss wasn’t the only reason for their stress this time...

“I know he told us not to torch it, but...it’s a hecka creepy forest. Couldn’t find a forest this poisonous back home even if you tried, and that’s sayin’ something.”

They didn’t know it, but their troops had already invaded territory under Mynoghra’s influence. In other words, the scenery around them had changed from the Accursed Lands into the more vicious Cursed Terrain created by Mynoghra’s mere presence. The earth reeked of rot and the trees were gnarled monstrosities. Flowers oozed liquids with a striking color and dense miasma hung thickly over the whole area.

Demons were unaffected by the miasma, but even with their mentality as demons, they still found their surroundings grotesque and strange.

“Yeah, it’s not somethin’ you see every day. Boss said there’s an enemy who could get in the Demon Lord’s way up ahead, but...what kinda beast are they?”

“Well, they ain’t no Hero, that’s for sure.”

“*Haha!* You can say that again!”

Dry laughter echoed through the Accursed Lands, earning curious looks from the low-level monsters keeping a watchful eye on their surroundings. Unsettling

silence followed their laughter, and the two demons silently exchanged looks.

It was strictly forbidden to mention the Hero within the Demon Lord's Army. Severe punishment was unavoidable even if he was mentioned with innocent intentions, so only an incredibly rash person or someone with an ulterior motive would ever utter that name jokingly.

Flame Knight brought up the Hero for the latter reason. With that joke, he'd determine whether his companion was worthy of hearing the treacherous tale he was about to tell. And it seemed Flame Mage had passed the test.

"Did ya know Boss is gonna *betray* the Demon Lord?"

"C'mon, buddy, what's gotten into you? That's too much, even for a joke. You really will get torched to death if the boss overhears that one."

"There's a high chance he didn't get permission from the Demon Lord to start this little war."

"Whoa, that's bold..."

Flame Mage was more shocked by what Flame Knight said than he'd thought. He'd expected Flame Knight to reveal some big secret from the way he'd tested the waters first but talking about betraying the Demon Lord was on an entirely different level.

As far as he knew, the Demon Lord's Army had rock-solid unity, and even the cunning and ruthless Flamin was loyal to their cause. Rather than thinking he'd heard something he shouldn't have, he was more surprised about how that could even be possible.

"Never mind, let's stop talkin' about this," Flame Knight said. "I might just suspect the big boss's motives because he's been acting funny."

"Don't wuss out on me now! We're in the same boat now that we both know. We might even be able to pick up on somethin' if we both keep an eye out. Isn't it better to have somebody to talk to, especially with our lives on the line?"

Flame Mage was so passionate that he'd started speaking in a loud voice that he quickly tempered to continue persuading his companion. His words seemed to convince Flame Knight, because he nodded with a stern expression and

began to talk about what led him to believe the treacherous secret he'd shared.

"Do you remember when we first came to this world? If you're like me, you would've woken up in the same place as everybody else..."

"Yeah, that's how it was for me too. Unlike the monsters we summoned later, us high-ranking demons remember being with each other from the start."

"But the Demon Lord and Boss had a different experience. Seems like somethin' went down before we ended up in this world."

"Somethin' only the Four Generals and the other top dogs know about?"

"It's hard to say. Boss said he was 'chosen'... At any rate, whatever happened was enough to push him to make up his mind big time."

Flame Knight had only heard bits and pieces from Flamin, but connecting the pieces together made it clear that something had happened. Something so shocking that a cunning man who never revealed what he was thinking accidentally vented secrets to one of his subordinates. Flame Knight noticed the subtle change in him because he was always closely watching Flamin to make sure he didn't upset him.

But it was all speculation on his part. He didn't hear Flamin say a word about betraying the Demon Lord. More than anything else, the event Flamin and the Demon Lord went through was something so unrealistic that he didn't want to accept it.

"C'mon, stop beating around the man-eating bush! Out with it already! It's not smart to let ourselves get too distracted by chitchat while we're leadin' a literal army of monsters. So, what happened to 'em?" Flame Mage pressured him to go on, his voice raising a notch with his impatience.

His remark brought Flame Knight back to his senses and he nodded, his mind made up to go through with telling what he knew. He wasn't getting any closer to the truth thinking about it on his own, after all. So, he decided to lay out everything he knew and see what his buddy thought.

"Yeah, you've got a point there. Truth is, Boss and the Demon Lord met some *being* before they came to this world... And that *being* told them that..."

Flame Mage swallowed the lump in his throat after he learned a piece of the truth. He had a fairly high rank within the Demon Lord's Army, and not only did he not know anything about what had happened, but the Demon Lord and the others had kept it a secret from the rest. In other words, that was proof that what had happened to them before coming to this world had significant meaning.

Anxiety over what the future held for them and curiosity about what was happening to them raged within Flame Mage as he impatiently waited for Flame Knight's next words. But their situation suddenly changed before the veil could be lifted from the truth.

"Hold on, the vanguard unit's back," Flame Knight said. "Looks like somethin' happened."

"Dammit, just as we were gettin' to the good part... Oh well," Flame Mage turned from his companion to direct his questions to the returning vanguard. "So, did you get any intel? What kinda enemy are we up against? We know they have a city, but were you able to locate it?"

The branches rustled as they parted, revealing the familiar build of one of the Orcs they had sent ahead to scout. No matter how confident the demons were in their strength, their opponent was still a mystery. It never hurt to be cautious. They had sent several monsters to investigate how strong their enemy was.

Flame Mage was about to sigh over how slow-witted the low-level monster was as it ambled closer without an ounce of wariness, but what he saw caused his eyes to widen with shock instead.

"Whoa, what the flaming pits of hell's wrong with you?!" he shouted in surprise.

It was definitely an Orc that had stumbled out from between the trees. They weren't the fastest or most agile of monsters by any means, but the demons had sent them out to scout because they could at least communicate on a basic level and did well enough in battle...

And yet, the Orc that had returned had such a grotesque appearance it was easy to tell something was SERIOUSLY wrong.

“AuGh? WhAt?”

It let out a strangled croak that erupted from its throat and sounded nothing like a noise an Orc would make. Orcs are demi-human monsters that look like someone placed a pig’s head on top of a large, adult human male’s body. But there was something on his face that shouldn’t be there... A large, fleshy growth was protruding from his eye sockets, and it almost looked like a hornworm or something was growing inside of it as disturbing, pulsating shades of red, green, and yellow writhed about.

It didn’t look like an injury caused by an attack. It also didn’t seem like he’d contracted a strange, new disease. No, something had clearly parasitized him.

As soon as they realized this, the two demons drew their weapons and put the monsters with them on high alert.

“WhErE? BuRRReh-oH...eYeS...cAn’T...sEe...”

“Don’t come any closer!! Get ready to attack!!” Flame Knight shouted, and the monsters around him fell into a confused uproar.

Unintelligent monsters were impossible to get under control once they became confused. Flame Mage repeated the orders to help control the situation, but it only spurred the chaos. The two flame demons leading the monsters were better suited for taking orders than giving them. They didn’t have enough experience to think calmly and quell the panic mounting within their disorganized troops, which resulted in them taking their eyes off the obviously infected Orc, who staggered toward the closest monster.

“BuRRR, bu-RE-he-Hu-uhh! Blueeeeerrrghhhhh!”

“GHH! GyaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaAAAAAAA!!”

“What the?!”

There was a loud *kersploosh* as flesh ruptured and an insect that looked like a giant, mutated ant burst out of the malignant growth. The bug lunged at the monster, who’d fallen backward out of terror, latched onto its neck with its distorted mandibles with horrifying accuracy, and bit its head right off. Gold coins spilled onto the forest floor with a metallic clang and the lingering echo of the monster’s death cry.

The two demons finally got their wits about them when they heard that all-too-familiar sound and saw the coins glittering under the shafts of sunlight filtering through the trees, and started shouting harried orders.

“It’s the enemy! The enemy’s attacking! Prepare to fight!”

More of the same deranged insects swooped in from the skies above. The rest of the vanguard unit lumbered out of the dark woody depths with slow, arduous steps. Flame Knight cut down the bugs lunging for his throat as he watched the low-level monsters under his command fall to the same attack out of the corner of his eye.

“Dammit all!” he shouted, enraged. “We’re in the worst location for this! We’re payin’ for not torching the place to hell!”

Screaming about it did nothing to help him make up for the difference in strength. They weren’t leading an army of puny monsters by any means. If you just looked at their strength as individuals, they were actually strong. But the place and time were not in their favor—no, they were strongly in their opponent’s favor.

They were on a battlefield with poor visibility, in a situation where their troops were in disarray. Then there was the additional inconvenience of the miasma weakening a good number of the monsters. If that wasn’t bad enough on its own, they were up against a small enemy that was difficult to attack. And then there was the fact their own boss had forbidden them from using fire—their Ultimate Attack. Everything about the situation worked against them.

The already difficult situation was just about to get a whole lot worse...

“OOOH! HOW DARE YOU BURN THE FOREST! HOW COULD YOU ATTEMPT THE DESTRUCTION OF THE ALL-LOVING ACCURSED LANDS?! AS HUEMANS, WE CAN’T ALLOW SUCH TREACHERY TO PASS!”

“...What the?! Who goes there?!”

Three shadowy figures caroused out of the forest depths at Flame Knight’s question. These monsters, with human skin tied to their gnarled bodies, began animatedly blathering incomprehensible nonsense as they brandished blades that had rusted and dulled from all the blood they’d soaked up.

“‘WHO GOES THERE?’ NOW THAT’S AN OLD-FASHIONED LINE! HOW HUEMAN OF YOU!”

“OH, IT IS QUITE HUEMAN, ISN’T IT?! AND LOOK AT THAT, ICHIRO! LOOK AT THE STATE OF THEIR SKIN! WHY, WON’T IT BRING US ONE STEP CLOSER TO BEING ALL THE MORE HUEMAN IF WE STUDY NEW SKIN TYPES?!”

“OOH! OOOOOOH! JIRO! WHAT A BRILLIANT IDEA! WE MUST THANK HIS MAJESTY! FOR PREPARING SUCH! A MARVELOUS! STAGE FOR US TO OBTAIN NEW SKIN! ALL HAIL THE KING!”

Mynoghra’s ultimate Medic unit, the Brain Eaters, had joined the fray.

Did they intend to take this battle seriously from the start? Or did they simply deem it unnecessary to play around? After removing their trademark plague mask and robes, they tore the nearest monsters apart with their grotesque bodies on full display.

“Wh-What hell did these things crawl outta? They’re wearing human skin!”

“Are they insane? Even by our standards?! Watch your back, buddy!”

Were Flame Knight and Flame Mage so perturbed by their uncanny appearance and deranged behavior because they were from different games? Even though both sides should be cut from the same evil cloth?

“WHY, IT’S UTTERLY RIDICULOUS FOR DEMONS TO BE APPALLED AT A LIL’ SKINNING!”

“DENYING ANOTHER HUEMAN’S HOBBIES IS OUTRAGEOUS!”

“WE ARE BRAIN EATERS! WE SHALL LEAD YOU TO YOUR GRAVE PER HIS MAJESTY’S ORDERS!”

Both sides received the same buffs from the Cursed Terrain because they were evil-aligned. Flame Knight and Flame Mage were superior when it came to normal combat. However, the scales of battle remained balanced.

“GSHAAAA!!”

“MMPH!”

One of the Brain Eater’s arms was lopped off. He nimbly snatched it out of the

air, purple blood spraying everywhere, and leaped back to put some distance between him and Flame Knight. Then he handed the severed arm to his companion.

“Oh dear, this looks bad. Can you handle it for me, Saburo?”

“Mm, now that’s an injury you can be proud of. Let’s show it to the little ladies later.”

“What a marvelous idea, Saburo!”

The next moment, another Brain Eater...took out a distorted instrument and something like thread, and in a blink of an eye, he sutured the amputated arm.

“Shit! Healing Magic! They have skills, too? What a pain!”

“They aren’t undefeatable, but...it’ll be a drain on our forces.”

Healing Magic was where the true value of the Brain Eaters came in. The ability was originally designed to heal troops on a military scale, so this level of treatment could be done in an instant. It wasn’t normal surgery. Sensing some skill had been used, Flame Knight and Flame Mage gritted their teeth, realizing the situation was even worse than they first thought.

“What do you want to do, buddy? Things are only gonna get worse at this rate.”

“Let’s retreat for now. It’s too much for us to handle. Let’s tell the boss.”

“Then we’ll slow them down with the monsters. There’s an endless supply of ‘em. Dammit, we’re in for an earful from the big boss.”

“It’s better than getting our skin peeled off here.”

Did they take after their master? The two demons instantly agreed upon that cunning and ruthless plan and ordered the monsters to guard their backs as they retreated.

“WE HAVE BUT ONE THING TO SAY IN RESPONSE TO THAT: WE WON’T LET YOU GO!”

“HA!”

Flame Knight exchanged blows with the Brain Eater that had lunged at him

and spun around to hotfoot it out of there as soon as he saw an opening. The demons serving Flamin were even better at fleeing than fighting.

As nothing more than Medics, the Brain Eaters couldn't prevent them from fleeing. They had allowed the enemy to retreat.



“...**WHEW**, we got away somehow. Those were some flamin' creepy abominations.”

“You can say that again. The usual won't work on 'em. It ain't gonna be pretty, but we'd better advise the boss to rebuild his attack force.”

The two demons discussed their next plan of action as they raced through the distorted trees. Rugged terrain pervaded the Accursed Lands, but anyone skilled in the art of escaping could navigate through them at a decent speed. As long as the monsters continued to serve as bait, they should be able to run away without an issue, even with the unknown threat hot on their tail.

Most of all, Flame Knight and Flame Mage were considered elites within the Demon Lord's Army. They stood a cut above the rest, and they even remembered crossing blades with the Hero's party more than a few times. Whoever—whatever—their enemy may be, they weren't likely to lose. Sure, they'd suffered a hard blow getting hit by a surprise attack in unfamiliar terrain, but they were ready for next time.

They were that confident in themselves. And it was because of their arrogance that they were blinded to the real threat.

“Oh dearie me, whatever do we have here?”

The voice of a pure and chaste, closeted maiden echoed through the Accursed Lands that embodied all that was preternatural.

“Who goes there?!”

Both demons readied their weapons. What appeared before the cocky elites without them even noticing was a threat that far surpassed the humanoid abominations they were on the run from. The eerie amount of pressure that was so great it could be seen pressing down on their surroundings set off more

alarm bells within them than anything else.

“I presume you are esteemed members of the glorious Demon Lord’s Army, yes? So-called dark beings that stand against the light and threaten world peace?”

“Show yourself!!”

Flame Mage launched a fire spell without a lock on his target. That was completely against orders, but they were no longer in a position to leisurely follow orders. Luckily, the miasma and humidity permeating the Accursed Lands didn’t let the trees burst into flames, but the two demons didn’t even have the time to care.

“*Tch, tch, tch*. You naughty boys. That’s not how we should do this.”

The sound of something massive moving was growing louder. Something was approaching.

Their survival instincts were blaring at them to get out of there, but their demon pride made them reluctant to flee for the second time. Besides, they didn’t know what direction their enemy was coming from. The dense and overgrown cursed trees had distorted their sense of direction.

“You must carry yourselves with the absolute, terrifying brilliance befitting those born of the darkness...”

They ran out of time—it was there.

A giant insect had emerged from between the trees. It descended between the two demons with a thudding sound that made them feel its sheer mass. This bug, which was more dreadful-looking than any monster they’d ever seen, aroused a whole different dimension of horror in them.

Enormous breasts protruded from its huge insect torso. Its two sets of wings glistened with a rainbow of colors as they flapped in tandem, almost at odds with its razor-sharp, sickle-like forearms. Perhaps no more at odds than its disorienting *gichigichi* hissing was from its soothing voice that comforted the ears like a masterpiece sung by a songstress.

Everything about it equated to crushing pressure and overwhelming fear in

their eyes.

Flamin's two demons had stumbled deep into the Queen of Bugs' dominion without realizing it.

Flame Knight / Flame Mage

HP: 350 MP:100

Attack: 25

Defense: 20

Magic: 13 Agility: 18

Mini-bosses under Flamin you will encounter on Flame Mountain.

Flame Knight inflicts physical attack damage, while Flame Mage inflicts magic attack damage.

Flame Mage inflicts greater overall damage, so take him out first.

You can easily defeat them if one of your party members can use water magic, but their fire attacks do a lot of damage in one hit, so you're likely to lose if you don't watch your HP.

They don't have any special drops, so they are a lot of work for little reward.

Chapter 5: Defense

CRUNCH, CRUNCH, CRUNCH.

“Blegh... Not very nutritious, are they?”

The sounds of a hard skull being chomped apart and the soft, inner flesh being ripped out and masticated echoed through the eerie woods. Isla dexterously used her forearms to eat something Humanoid and then tilted her head like a sommelier appraising a poor excuse for wine before she chucked the corpse—chucked what remained of Flame Knight—onto the ground.

“The flavors lack cohesion to tie them together, and it has such an odd aftertaste... And it’s so sinewy, some weird little bones got stuck in the back of my throat. How unpleasant.”

Threads boasting the strength of steel were strung around the trees, and monsters missing parts of their bodies hung from them. Body parts were impaled on the tips of twisted branches like butcherbirds impaled on twigs for later consumption, and the blood dripping from them soaked into the cursed land. But that wasn’t all there was to the disturbing scene—eggs contained within sticky mucus sacks had been laid all throughout the ground and trees, pulsating with new life as they fed off the dead.

If the concept of hell existed in this world, then any good soul would say that this place was hell on earth. Perhaps there were even some evil souls out there who’d consider this spot a demented form of paradise.

The one thing that could be said for sure was that the monsters from *Brave Questers* who’d tried to pass through this place had all become insect fodder.



Predation

Skill

Restores 10% of HP each time you destroy an enemy.

※ Predation is mainly possessed by Mabeast units and it heals the target over regular intervals. However, units with Inorganic Distinct Features will nullify this skill.

“Master told me they were fairly strong opponents, so I got my hopes up, but I must say I am quite disappointed, rude as that may be to His Majesty. They lacked toughness as prey and as a meal.”

Isla exhaled a disappointed sigh, elegantly wiped the blood from her mouth, and turned her massive body completely around to face another direction.

In this place where all of Isla’s foolish enemies had lost their lives and had their lofty ambitions squashed, the sole survivor of their forces showed up and clicked his tongue with visible irritation.

“It figures that monsters who’ve only ever fought Humans are pathetically weak when it comes to a battle like this. As a menu item, I’d give them...*hmm*...a three out of ten.”

Isla’s six crimson bug eyes coldly fixed on the man. Judging by his appearance, he looked like a character from *Brave Questers*, and he seemed completely unfazed by the hellscape before him. All he seemed to feel in spades was intense frustration.

“I’m talking about your underlings, if you didn’t get the hint?”

The man was called Flame Demon Flamin.

“Well, ain’t you in a damn good mood, vermin. Though it seems like my men weren’t up to your tastes. *Kehehehe!*” the man cackled.

He looked like a stringy Human male that would make for a fine toothpick after her previously sinewy meal. Sadly, his flesh and bones looked less healthy than a week-old corpse and emitted an unceasing burning hot flame like an eternally lit torch. His vertically torn, red irises glared at Isla with the burning desire to kill her.

These two boss-level creatures maintained a strange silence with the jarring chorus of trilling Larva, watching from between the trees, serving as their background music.

The reason for their silence was obvious—they were assessing each other’s abilities.

Flamin was analyzing his opponent’s strength from her intense level of

darkness and the overwhelming pressure her presence put on the area...and what the strung-up corpses of his army entailed...

Isla determined from his appearance that she was up against some kind of boss character and guessed his strength from the overwhelming loss of her Larva...

This encounter was a mystery to the two powerful entities who'd spent a long time in a world where they knew all the rules. They could tell their opponent's power level by feeling even if they couldn't see it. They both decided that they shouldn't underestimate the other.

"Name yourself," Flamin demanded warily, using some skill to make his flames cover his whole body.

All his underlings had been annihilated. Since he'd entrusted most of his troops to Flame Knight and Flame Mage, the most powerful demons serving him, he had no guards or attendants. He remained vigilant, thinking he wouldn't stand a chance if she got the jump on him, but Isla cheerfully offered her name as if she didn't think she needed such trickery to defeat him.

"I am one of the Heroes belonging to the empire of Mynoghra, ruled by the great and mighty King of Ruin, Takuto Ira. They call me Isla, Queen of Bugs."

"I'm Flame Demon Flamin, one of the Demon Lord's Four Generals."

Neither was familiar with the other. They were both from a world the other didn't know. They were both up against someone who'd come from a different game. In other words, both Isla—who understood that Flamin existed under a similar set of circumstances as she did—and Flamin—who didn't know a thing about this world yet—were convinced that they were utterly incompatible with each other.

"You're one of the Demon Lord's Four Generals, eh? I remember hearing about another one of you from Atou. What was he called again? Ice Rock, was it?"

"Yeah. Guess he died. Not that I'd expect more from someone who had ice for brains."

Although the giant bug deliberately avoided telling him exactly how their

encounter had ended, Flamin guessed from her goading tone that his fellow general had been defeated by these freakish abominations and gnashed his teeth in frustration because of it.

Ice Rock had been ended all too easily.

Flamin didn't realize they were up against such a difficult enemy. The Demon Lord's Four Generals were equal as far as their title, but there was a clear hierarchy when it came to their strength differences. Ice Rock was undoubtedly the weakest of the four. There was a clear gap between him and Flamin.

But they were all members of the Demon Lord's Army—the spawn of malice that made its name known throughout the world and from which every living being ran from in fear. They were the destroyers that could only be opposed by the Hero—the direct counterpart to evil.

How could such a force be so easily defeated?

He should've had a huge army under him... Flamin thought. *I doubt they were all killed... Dammit! I can't even confirm things in my current position!*

Not only did the Dragontan invasion force consist of the monsters they'd summoned, but many of the demons under Ice Rock had joined the fray too. The number was overwhelmingly larger than the small brigade Flamin had mobilized behind the Demon Lord's back. It shouldn't have mattered how easily the weaker monsters could be squished by the Demon Lord's Four Generals—they had always been a serious threat to the humans they'd faced before.

It wouldn't be an exaggeration to say the invasion force's size was overkill to take down one little town. So how could such a large division of the Demon Lord's Army led by one of his generals go down just like that? It'd take time for even a smart man like Flamin to accept what Isla said to be true.

But...I guess small fry will be small fry no matter where you are, he thought.

However, even when faced with the dire reality that his fellow general and his troops had been entirely wiped out, Flamin was convinced by his tremendous confidence in his ability to survive what *they* could not.

...After all, monsters were nothing more than pawns to *Brave Questers'* Demon Lord's Army. It wasn't purely due to incompetence or a lack of cohesion

as an army that led to their pitiful downfall. Ultimately, even the biggest horde could be easily taken down by the strength of a single person. Everything could be flipped around by a single individual. The Hero and the Demon Lord were perfect examples of that.

In their world, war was settled by an ultimate duel between two individuals. To them, taking action with an army was secondary. Essentially, the way they used their army was similar to a rear support guard or along the lines of a throwaway match.

Hence why Flamin remained where he was. He believed that if he defeated the enemy before him, he could overturn the results of the last battle. And he actually wasn't that wrong, given that *Brave Questers'* Demon Lord's Army could summon monsters at little to no cost.

"Well, you should know he's the runt of the Four Generals. I'm at least twice as strong as him... You're in for a world of pain if you expect things to go down the same way. *Kehehehe.*"

"Why, aren't you confident... Are you saying you're different?"

"Different 'nough to roast your carapace and drag the big bug you serve off his throne like the loser he is. What was his name again? Takuto Ira? *Mwahaha!*"

It was petty goading. But disrespecting the king, even as petty goading, was the biggest taboo offense to Mynoghra's citizens—especially its Heroes.

"Oh my... You have some nerve setting your filthy sights on our mighty master and king, demon *scum.*"

Isla's fangs snapped together in her fury and the invisible pressure exploded like a bomb going off. As Isla erupted with rage that was unlike her usual calm persona, Flamin was buried under a rush of Larva triggered by their queen's anger. His skeletal body was covered by the swarm, instantly creating what looked like a human-shaped, bug-covered black statue that made buzzing noises.

"....."

Isla watched in silence.

An explosion suddenly went off in the center of that disturbing art piece, and red-hot flames consumed the black.

“So that’s how you work, eh? *Kehehe!* Bugs are my favorite! There’s no shortage of enemies for me to burn. I’ll burn you down like the annoying gnats you are!”

Flamin appeared from the fire, the flames covering his body growing more intense to burn off the Larva swarming him. He cackled with glee as the Larva let out *gigigi* death throes and turned to ash.

“Come at me then. I don’t mind rough men. However, you are still up against a lady. I expect you to be the perfect gentleman while we do this little dance.”

Queen Isla also laughed.

The rondo between two bosses boasting absolute power was about to start.



“**WHAT’CHA** thinking...Your Majesty?”

“Is there anything we can help with?”

“Nah...just got a lot on my mind.”

Back at Mynoghra’s Imperial Capital, in a plaza located in a corner of the complex city built in the trees, Takuto was telepathically confirming the state of his units when he noticed two girls were peering into his face.

The two girls were the Elfuur Sisters, Maria and Caria, Takuto’s caretakers and Mynoghra’s future leader candidates. All the civilians had been evacuated to one safe location because of the invasion, but the two girls who served as Takuto’s attendants refused repeated orders to leave, choosing to instead go where he went.

They refused to leave, saying they needed to fulfill their duties as caretakers, but it was obviously because they were frustrated that they couldn’t do anything to help in this time of need. There was also the fact that the Brain Eaters, who’d become like their direct subordinates, had sortied too.

So, Takuto had lost the chance to convince them to evacuate and had unofficially allowed them to stay with him because he was also under heavy

guard by the Warriors. Those girls were worried about him—meaning, he let how he felt show on his face. Shocked that he'd become so lost in the labyrinth of his thoughts, Takuto decided to tell them what was on his mind so he could better organize his thoughts on the situation.

“When it comes to characters from strategy games and characters from role-playing games, strategy game characters are overwhelmingly superior,” he explained. “The difference should be huge if both sides have to conform to their game standards, given the advantages granted by *Eternal Nations*’ settings, but...” He looked at each girl’s face, then up at the sky and groaned. “Isla is currently fighting Flame Demon Flamin. The Brain Eaters are on standby to jump in as backup if anything funny happens and to watch the rear too. The rest of the Larva are on guard throughout the Accursed Lands as well.”

Everything seemed to be going according to plan. He'd weaved his strategy based on intel from Atou, and the analysis of their forces and the transition between battles was all happening within the expected range.

“Gia’s Warriors are on standby at the defensive barricade they built at the city’s entrance and are also guarding the Dark Elves evacuating to the office building.” He cast down his gaze and stared at the woodgrain in the floorboards. “We’ll deal a fatal blow to our enemy’s forces if we defeat Flamin. Going off of Ice Rock’s combat ability, Isla should be more than capable of dealing with him now that she’s leveled up...”

Takuto squeezed his eyes shut and irritably scratched his head. The twins tilted their heads, confused by his reaction to his own explanation. They had no idea what was bothering him so much. What about what he just said was a problem?

“Hmmm...”

A single doubt had plummeted Takuto into the sea of thought and caused him to groan endlessly since a little while ago.

I’m overlooking something.

That tiny, baseless doubt gnawed away at him like heartburn.

The difference in strength is...staggering.

The scale between the world settings for *Eternal Nations*, which allowed players to create natural disasters, build ginormous weapons that pierced the skies, and move armies in the tens of thousands, was drastically at odds with the world settings for *Brave Questers*, which were more about giving the player an adventure and using magic one-on-one, rather than army against army.

Takuto had been extremely wary because he was up against someone from an RPG, but once they clashed, he realized they were easy enough to deal with. His biggest concern was the Unmissable Move that Ice Rock had used. As far as he remembered of his time with that game, Ice Rock did use an attack like that. It annoyed him in the game too, but it was a million times worse to deal with in real life.

But that skill only belonged to Ice Rock of the Demon Lord's Four Generals. Even after Takuto dug through his memories, he couldn't remember anything about Flamin having any special attacks. He was renowned for being near impossible to beat on normal mode without equipping the proper anti-fire accessories because the flame spells he'd launch one after the other with his strong magic were killer... But, put another way, that's really all there was to him.

It should be possible to win with Mynoghra in its current state as long as they didn't let their guard down, and if he was right about the randomly appearing Barbarians coming from the RPG's ability to summon monsters, then they'd practically solved their greatest concern.

But...Takuto couldn't shake the feeling something wasn't right. Alarms blared in the back of his mind with the same anxious feeling as a small bone being stuck in the back of his throat.

He double-checked the status of all his active operations and carefully scrutinized the information coming in from his units. Atou and Elder Moltar had already squashed a division of the enemy's army and were currently cleaning up the stragglers.

Takuto considered reconnecting telepathically with Atou to ask for more details about her battle with Ice Rock, but he held off because she was still fighting, even if it was just the stragglers. If anything, forcing a conversation

with her might confuse the situation more than solving anything.

Takuto ran through his thoughts in every way possible to find the cause of his baffling anxiety. But no matter how he thought about it, he couldn't pinpoint what it was.

“Is this a case of foreboding that you just feel in your bones? Do either of you have any concerns about any of this?”

Seized by an escalating sense of foreboding, Takuto turned to the two girls serving him for answers.

Caria and Maria exchanged baffled looks and shook their heads at the same time.



Parasitic Egg

Skill

Every time you attack an organic unit, you have a small chance of inflicting Parasitize. Any units that have been Parasitized can no longer be controlled, and after a set time, a full-grown Larva will burst out of them, destroying the unit for good.

✂ This skill is unique to Isla, Queen of Bugs

Chapter 6: The Result of Freedom

“**SHIT!** Shit! Holy shit! This world has such a flamin’ awesome boss monster?! This world has such an effed-up denizen?! Hell yeah!”

Flamin shuddered with what could only be described as boyish glee.

Had he ever experienced such excitement, such a thrill in the many repeat lifetimes he’d lived through? Was there any emotion to be felt when he was stuck fighting the same enemies and doomed to taste the same exact death a thousand times over?

This man, who’d come to the unfounded conclusion that all battles were essentially worthless, was now thrust into the fight of his life that was nothing like any battle before it. The instincts screaming at him to avoid incoming attacks and the throbbing rage telling him to defeat his enemy invigorated him.

“How rude. You must never call a lady a monster, young ’un,” Isla chided.

“Nah, you’re a monster, all right. You’re as monstrous as they come.”

Flamin wasn’t exactly wrong about her.

Isla’s body was a hundred times bigger than any bug and her strength could only be described as monstrous. Plus, her abilities were still a huge unknown, and it was easy to tell that she was born out of some pretty whacked-up laws of nature. On top of all that was her personality. She normally behaved like a proper lady, but as a Hero, she had a certain fondness for battle too. When she fought with delight for nation and king, she became a true monster.

And then there was Flamin, another picture-perfect example of a real monster. Inexhaustible flames lashed out from his body at his enemy, and his cunning turned into poisonous fangs that ripped into any weakness they found.



In the world of *Brave Questers*, Flame Demon Flamin is said to be responsible for the destruction of countless kingdoms, and the Hero's party is required to make a great sacrifice to defeat him. In fact, many players hate his character...a lot.

The madness and malice he harbored within made him far more of a monster than looking like someone had lit a man at death's door on fire.

"Only a naughty man would keep calling a lady a monster... Oh, I know, why don't I seal that yapping trap of yours? You'll purr for me if I crush your throat, won't you?"

A torrent of power destroyed the massive trees as easily as snapping a stick.

The hellfire Flamin released as he agilely danced around twisted about like a giant dragon, burning all in its wake.

"Oooh, hot damn, somebody's impatient! Sounds like you want to put a quick end to things, so let me make that wish come true—by roasting you up nice and fine!"

The fight was at a stalemate, but the damage to the surrounding area was increasing at an accelerating rate.

Trees fell and erupted in flames.

Infinite Larva burst from their eggs and swarmed Flamin to aid their queen. After burning them out of existence with a light wave of his hand, Flamin spread his arms wide in an exaggerated gesture, his face distorted with euphoria.

"KUAHAHAHAHA! It ain't fair if you're the only one using pawns!"

Flamin summoned monsters.

Fire-spewing dogs answered his call.

Burning straw dolls dancing a strange little jig answered his call.

Red-skinned orcs with flame-tipped spears answered his call.

Various monsters appeared from the void and took formation to protect him.

But a second later, they left his side as if they were repelled.

“Dammit! I’m playing with the giant mantis! Y’all can torch those pesky gnats! Use whatever method, fire magic included! I don’t give a damn ’bout anything anymore. Burn it all to hell!”

“My precious children, please play with those monsters. Make mama proud by taking the lot of them down.”

The opposing monsters began their own battles, accelerating the destruction of the Accursed Lands. Inhuman battle cries echoed through the woods, followed by the loud reverberations of things being destroyed left and right. The area had been so desolated that it went beyond simple deforestation, making it a tragic sight to behold.

Trees were completely knocked over or burned until they toppled and spread the conflagration, and the ground had cratered as if a bomb had gone off. The whole area was covered in charbroiled Larva corpses and permeated by the stench monsters gave off in their final moments as they spilled their innards before turning into glittering gold coins.

“I must say, being able to summon without any cost is cheating,” Isla said.

“Don’t blame me. It’s your fault for not bein’ able to do it. Weaklings die. The incapable die. Isn’t it the way of the world for only the strong and capable to make it?”

“I have to agree with you there,” Isla replied.

The world is cruel.

There’s no kindness or lenience for the weak, just those who rob and are robbed.

There are no rules to protect the powerless, just violence.

Both Isla and Flamin came from such twisted worlds.

No matter how they won or lost, it’d always be brushed under the rug with the reasoning that the loser lost simply because they were weaker.

However, nothing in their worlds was so convenient as to allow the infinite summoning of underlings without any limitations whatsoever...

“Oh dear, it looks like the rules governing you come with some annoying side

effects..." Isla observed.

"...Dammit!"

With every positive comes a negative... In *Brave Questers*, only a set number of monsters can participate in any single battle. In other words, there were no melee mechanics in their world—they had to select a specific target to fight—and that restriction wouldn't be lifted until some unknown mechanic determined their battle was over.

This was why Flamin's summoned monsters had immediately left his side. Fighting Isla wasn't allowed because of the limit on the maximum number of enemy groups. Being able to summon an infinite number of monsters was actually a fatal drawback against Mynoghra's forces.

Not even Flamin himself could escape from this deadly constraint. Worst yet, he was locked out of being able to escape because he was a boss character. Ultimately, he was stuck fighting Isla until the battle ended.

Isla, on the other hand, was free to choose her combat actions. Since the characters of *Eternal Nations* typically fight alongside armies against other armies, the descriptions of their individual battles are vaguer, placing fewer combat constraints on them compared to the characters from *Brave Questers*.

"...That's why they keep getting in your way like this."

"Dammit! You little pieces of shit!"

Even now, endless batches of newly born Larva swarmed Flamin, stealing his ability to see anything but black. Isla took that momentary lapse in his defenses to join her Larva in battle and grab one of the monsters rendered defenseless by their game constraints with her raptorial foreleg in a lightning-fast pounce, then she drove her stinger into her prey. The monster convulsed, its eyeballs swelling like balloons as they began to flash in warning, like a countdown.

"*Hahaha!* C'mon, what the hell was that?! You'll deposit your eggs on the nearest warm body? Anyone will do for you? How slutty can you get, you giant botfly?!"

Flamin's face betrayed his lack of calm as he ridiculed her. His quick mind instantly realized that her ability allowed her to create an endless army of her

own—using his monsters. If he continued to summon his forces, she'd pick off the ones rendered defenseless by their game mechanics, parasitize them, and give birth to new infested soldiers. Flamin was essentially building his enemy's army for her.

It didn't matter that he could summon an infinite number of monsters from *Brave Questers* when he had his own limitations. The fire spells he used to attack also cost MP. As a boss character, he normally wouldn't ever deplete his MP in battle, but that rule went out the window when the fight was lasting longer than anything against the Hero.

On the other hand, it'd be just as difficult to entirely stop summoning his minions. They may've just been squishy bugs that took a moment to squish, but the constant flood of Larva swarming Flamin definitely made the battle lean in Isla's favor.

Hence why he found his hands tied, and emotion akin to panic began to dominate his thoughts. Whether or not his enemy knew his mental turmoil, a torrent of power on par with a storm knocked down all the trees as it assailed him.

But then the relentless gusts of power coming from all directions eased a little.

"May I ask you a question?" Isla suddenly said.

"Huh? Don't put out the flames of adrenaline pumping through this fight. You and I are destined to kill each other. There's no need for excess chitchat."

"Now, now. Don't shut it down before you hear me out. My king is telling me to ask you this no matter what."

At that remark, Flamin jumped back to put distance between them, his flames still burning strong to repel any surprise attacks.

This gives me a second to come up with another plan... he thought, internally relieved. He'd come off as opposed to talking, but the situation was gradually deteriorating...for him. He was grateful for the chance to take a breather and recover. Not to mention, he was deeply curious about the people he was up against.

They're clearly from similar origins as us, he thought. So what world did they come from? What were they fighting and with what motive did they come to this world?

Flamin had the curiosity and the intelligence necessary to want to gather more information on his opponents.

"Why are you attacking us and the town of Dragontan?" Isla asked. "You may be the Demon Lord's Army that brings darkness to the world, but we still can't find any rational meaning behind your sudden and illogical attack."

At that question, Flamin felt something other than the desire to be cunning and ruthless. The first new emotion he experienced was surprise. The other was contempt of the highest level.

"...Oh. *PUHAHAHA!* I see. You don't know a thing, do ya? Or is that puny king of yours hiding it from you? I see! I see now! You poor, poor, *puppet!*"

This was the instant Flamin realized he had an overwhelming advantage on the information front. Although the sad fact was that such information wouldn't aid him one bit in this battle.

"Thanks for your generous warning," Isla said with feigned gratitude. "However, my loyalty won't be swayed by such pitiful baiting."

"As if I didn't know that."

Isla spoke the truth. Her loyalty was unwavering, and her trust in the king would never sway her actions. She'd never once doubted Takuto, and she'd gladly offer her life even on the off chance he was deceiving her.

Isla harbored but one concern: that their opponent knew something important that Mynoghra did not.

Does this mean they know something not even Master Takuto does? she wondered. What caused us to come to this world is still unknown, and the underlying phenomenon behind it is an even greater mystery. I don't know how they caught a glimpse of the elusive truth, and it's even more frustrating that he's not the type to easily spill his guts.

Isla felt ashamed of herself. She obviously couldn't seek Takuto's opinion

while in combat. Just because she had the upper hand didn't mean she could underestimate her opponent. Letting her guard down for even a fraction of a second to overthink things could very well be the moment he took her life.

“What do you people...think of yourselves?”

Flamin almost seemed to be imploring her with that question.

Isla also found herself puzzled by his sudden query, but she still gave a clear answer in response.

“Are you having doubts about your existence? I am Mynoghra's Hero, Isla. King Takuto Ira's loyal servant. I am nothing more and nothing less than that.”

“Ha! *HaHAHHA!* You're a damn PUPPET! You're arrogant, excessively proud, and stick to your convictions. You're an effin' yes-man puppet who can only do as they're told!”

Isla gave a big nod in response to his observations, almost as if his words summed up the one truth that defined who she was and that she actually took pride in that fact.

“You disgust me,” he hissed.

But her answer ran contrary to what Flamin wanted to hear.

“*Ahh*, now I get it... I get why you piss me off so much,” he quietly began to say, his measured words seething with palpable anger. “When it comes down to it, you guys are *free*. You serve your king of your own volition, and you're standing here fighting out of your own damn free will. You can betray your king, yet you still choose to support him. Because you WANT to.”

Isla had a vague idea of what had incited his rage. Takuto had summarized what the game of *Brave Questers* was all about for her. And from that summary, she'd discovered the fatal and terrifying flaw built into the genre of games called role-playing games. No, perhaps it was going too far to call it a flaw. After all, the point of role-playing games is to play a certain role...

“So? How's it feel, puppet?” Flamin asked with a sneer. “How do you like serving someone of your own will?”

And so, Isla looked down on her opponent with a derisive gaze for the first

time.

“I’m swathed in supreme bliss daily. So, let me ask you, how does it feel to have no freedom whatsoever as you’re forced to play out your role, you pathetic string-puppet?”

“I feel like *shit!*”

The battle resumed.

The same scene repeated as if their battle had been rewound like a videotape as their minions and the terrain continued to be obliterated, except the battle now included a war of words too.

“But ya know what? I’ll be freed if I kill you here! I’ll finally be free! For the first time!”

“I see! So that’s what you’re after?! That’s your desire?! Oh my darkness! Whatever shall I do? You have become quite appealing now!”

“Shut the hell up, you buzzing botfly! Burn up and disappear already!”

The battle was progressing in Isla’s favor.

If you boast the strength of a hundred warriors, then you are bound to be tripped up by your own arrogance at times. But Isla’s strong force of will as a Hero never allowed for such mistakes. Meanwhile, the enemy she was cautious of was confused and panicked by the mysterious rules governing his incomprehensible foe.

Dammit all to hell! She just won’t burn! Why isn’t it working? Is there some sorta element affinity at play here too?

Flamin had been unloading fire damage on Isla with his constant flame spells. Each spell packed a mighty punch, even from an objective view, and had enough firepower to instantaneously melt even the hardest fire-resistant armor. On top of that, he was fighting a big ass bug. Although she appeared to be a subspecies that far exceeded the size of a normal insect, she didn’t fall under any other classification than that, and fire was typically the weakness for most bug-type monsters.

And yet, Flamin’s flames failed to penetrate the defense offered by Isla’s hard

carapace. Actually, he *had* to be damaging her if the black smoke smoldering from his direct hits was any indication. But he was doing far less damage than he thought possible.

Don't tell me...even elemental affinities function differently for us too?! Can this battle get any more annoying?! Flamin had come up with a hypothesis he seriously didn't want to be true. Unfortunately, he'd hit the nail on the head with his guess.

In the world of *Brave Questers*, each character can have a weakness or resistance to any element. Their elemental affinity determines the damage they'll take from offensive skills of the same element. For example, if the target is weak against fire, the damage of attacks from that element will be increased, and if the target is resistant, the damage will be lowered. Characters can even be weak against physical attacks. These weaknesses are built into the game system, and even Flamin was designed as being weak to water and ice.

Basically, the weakness or resistance applied to the character themselves, whereas *Eternal Nations* applied the same thing to the attack. It worked like this:

"This unit causes 10% more damage to ice units."

"This spell is 1.5x more effective on evil-aligned units."

Moreover, *Eternal Nations* doesn't emphasize weaknesses because of the wide variety of skills and their complexity. It has no system that allows another player to steal the win from a stronger opponent simply by exploiting their weaknesses.

Strong units are just that—*strong*. They have no convenient weaknesses or strategies to exploit. Unparalleled beings reign in that position because of their overwhelming strength. If you want to overcome the difference, you either have to hit them with an equally outrageous unit or use good tactics to steadily wear them out.

That difference in game mechanics took what looked like the worst match-up and flipped it on its head. And to them, being strong meant overwhelming the loser.

“Tch! Monsters, get out here already!” Flamin shouted.

More monsters answered his call.

“I don’t have enough firepower! Gimme a hand, pipsqueaks! Take turns attacking her! Attack until we wear her down to zero HP!”

Flamin forced his newly summoned minions into his limited party size and had them attack Isla from every angle. But the moment they tried, they were snatched up and devoured until they filled her belly. Her sizzling forearm that’d been seared by their fire spells rapidly regenerated as she snacked on his monsters.

He’d witnessed her Regeneration skill throughout the battle. As long as she had this skill, he’d never be able to end her no matter how many powerful spells he unloaded on her. He’d hoped that it’d stop if he filled her up with a buffet of monsters but regenerating by eating was caused by a skill...no way was there an upper limit to what she could eat.

Flamin was out of cards to play. In every battle until now, he had consigned his enemies to oblivion with his overwhelming firepower. He had no Ultimate Attack he could whip out at the last second like Frost General Ice Rock. His greatest skill was using cunning strategies to ensnare his enemy before the battle began. Of course, as one of the Four Generals, he had high-level stats, and his abilities weren’t inferior in any way.

Things might have been different if he was up against Atou. She had no Regeneration skills and was prone to provocation when it came to Takuto, which would’ve given him more opportunities to damage her and bring the battle to a draw, at least. But the Hero unit he was up against wasn’t Sludge Atou but Isla, Queen of Bugs.

What it all came down to was that...he was paired up with the worst opponent. In every possible way.

“Do you know why I, Isla, am called the ultimate Defense Hero?” Isla asked in a sonorous voice.

Flamin thrust out his palm to cast a special fire spell on her ugly, buggy mug, but then he noticed nothing was happening and realized that he’d completely

depleted his MP. In other words—

“Not only do I have abilities for defending cities, but I can also regenerate by using Predation, increase labor and combat forces with Larva, and, while I didn’t have the time to make them for this battle, I can produce traps as well. And if that wasn’t enough, I also grow stronger by gaining experience with every enemy I defeat. It’s a general rule that an invading force needs three times the strength of the defender to take a city, but if you want to get past me, then...

“...You need to bring at least five times my strength, or it’s not even worth my time.”

—that was also the moment Flamin’s fate was sealed.

“Ha! You sound damn proud of yourself! Think you’ve got this in the bag already? *Huh?*”

Perhaps depleting his MP also affected his energy levels, because Flamin felt unsteady on his feet as he put on a false show of power with less oomph than he had throughout their battle.

Once Isla confirmed there was still a little fight left in him by the light of life gleaming in the depths of his eyes, she let out a *gichigichi* cackle and imparted an unavoidable truth as her lips curled up in a ghastly cruel smile that shouldn’t be possible for an insect.

“Mynoghra’s king sees all that goes on within his domain. To spell it out for you, that means the second you set foot within this cursed land, your every move was already in the palm of his hand.”

Flamin’s eyes bulged with surprise. Isla ate up his reaction like it was a feast for the eyes and gave a delighted nod.

“Yes, yes. That’s right. Surprise attacks, subversion, sabotage, and cloak-and-dagger activities are all pointless within Mynoghra. His Majesty even knows his citizens’ intimate interactions at night, so he knew about how you sent your elite forces on a separate mission to assassinate and take our most important people hostage.”

“Damn you, you overgrown botfly!”

“It was a good try. All of your forces have been cleanly picked apart.”

From that comment, Flamin understood that the final ace he had up his sleeve was rendered useless from a very early stage. She only revealed it to him now out of spite. Flamin gnashed his teeth and gnawed on his lip.

He had ordered the elite minions he'd summoned to invade and raid the capital, but he didn't think they would be dealt with in this way. The more powerful a nation is, the more important it becomes to defend. Flamin was confident that his opponent would show some sort of weakness he could exploit if they learned their capital was being invaded. And even if his opponents continued to fight with an iron will after that, he could still inflict massive damage to their city and citizens.

From their conversations during this battle, Flamin inferred that his opponent hinged the meaning of her existence on belonging to the nation called Mynoghra, and he'd planned to win indirectly by destroying the source of her explosive strength. But...all his plans had come to naught.

Who in their right mind would ever think that his enemy's commander possessed the ability to see all that went on within his domain while giving real-time orders to his subordinates? There should be a limit to possessing such an overpowered, unfair ability. Isla had accused Flamin of cheating, but that was a case of the pot calling the kettle black.

This was the obvious outcome resulting from the difference in strategy games, which progress in terms of moving around empires and armies, versus role-playing games, which progress simply by following a linear story.

Flamin let out a long-suffering sigh. His MP had run out, and he was covered in injuries. It was a miracle he'd even lasted this long with how many high-tier spells he'd cast in succession.

He slowly moved one foot back, then another, until an invisible force locked his feet in place.

You can't escape from boss monsters in *Brave Questers*. Put another way, bosses have no means of fleeing either.

The battle had reached its end.

The loser was one of *Brave Questers'* Four Generals, Flame Demon Flamin.

The winner was one of Mynoghra's Hero units, Isla, Queen of Bugs.

And in accordance with the laws governing them, the winner is granted everything, while the loser is robbed of everything.

"I have a message for you from our king, Takuto Ira." Isla elegantly raised her raptorial forearms like a noblewoman lifting the sides of her skirt in a curtsy. "Your strategy wasn't bad—you were simply out of your league," says the king."

"Ha! *HahaHAHAHAHA!* Is that so? Is it?! *HAHaHA!*"

...I wanted freedom.

Flamin knew all too well that he'd been tossed out on a dinghy in the middle of a stormy sea. He finally had a reason for everything that had happened in his life after he was told the truth about the world in that mysterious space just before arriving in this new land. He also knew about the fate he was destined never to escape...

...I wanted freedom.

He wanted to be free of following someone else's orders, someone else's will, even free of his own will. He wanted the freedom that would allow him to break the shackles that bound him to what it meant to be Flamin. He believed that was possible if he could only conquer this new world. If he could only topple the empire of Mynoghra, if he could annihilate those strange and mysterious people...

He was *promised* his wish would come true if he destroyed this one world.

But his wish didn't come true. He'd forever lost the chance to make it happen.

Aaah, now I see. In the end, I'm...

Flamin smirked.

It was somehow refreshing.

As soon as he accepted the fact that he was a puppet, he felt like a fool for stubbornly seeking freedom. No matter where he went in the universe, he was

still the cunning and ruthless Flame Demon Flamin, one of the Demon Lord's Four Generals who opposed the Hero. He was nothing more and nothing less than that.

Then I'll play that role perfectly, he thought. I'll play it out to the very end. I'll show them what it really means to be me...

"Then deliver a message to that Takuto Ira of yours for me."

"What do you wish to say?"

A ginormous sickle-shaped claw loomed over his head. He was already so covered in fatal wounds that he could barely make out that incoming attack, much less dodge it. But Flamin hurled those words at her with the last vestiges of heat within him, as if making it known to all the world.

"Go to hell!"

The scythes swept in from the left and right, splitting Flamin's torso in half.

—Flame Demon Flamin was defeated.

"Phew..."

No one was left to respond to Isla's lengthy sigh. The surrounding area was so deathly still, it'd be hard to believe a battle just took place there if not for the scarred landscape and the mountain of corpses silently attesting to the horrors that had taken place.

"Good... Defending the capital was a success," Isla muttered to herself after taking in the scenery and confirming everything had come to an end without a hitch. "Losing so many Larva is a setback, but my level did go up as a result. I'll be able to use more powerful abilities from now on, so I'd say we broke even with our gains and losses on this one. I do feel sorry for my precious little ones, though..."

Mynoghra had suffered a slight blow with the damage dealt to its Larva numbers and the parts of their territory that had been turned into battlefields. But this was about as perfect an outcome as they could hope for coming out of a surprise attack on their capital. The Larva and land could be replenished and repaired in due time, and they even got the extra benefit of Isla leveling up

from her battle. Of all the things to be gained from this battle, her level-up was the most delightful achievement.

Isla thought over the various new abilities she could obtain from her level-up. Most Hero units like Isla acquired new abilities by leveling up, unlike Atou, who mainly acquired new abilities by stealing them from her enemies.

I can contribute even more to Mynoghra's overall strength if I acquire the skills Gregarious Phase, Traps, and Demise of the Crown.

With that in mind, Isla focused her mind to immediately send Takuto a telepathic message. Consulting her master came before making any decisions.

The battle was long over—there was nothing left to stay on high alert for. She didn't sense any enemies in the area, so it should be fine to let her guard down. She did just accept a telepathic message from Takuto to pass his final remark onto Flamin, so there shouldn't be anything on his end that would make it problematic for her to connect with him.

Or so she thought...

But she had failed to remember something important. It wasn't just her either, even Takuto had forgotten that key factor. They had forgotten what game event had made everyone hate Flamin so much. Forgotten the nature of what makes a role-playing game different.

"Master Takuto, can you hear me?" Isla sent Takuto a telepathic message. "I disposed of the problem without an issue and would like to discuss something with you. I leveled up during this battle and was debating which skill to acquire first..."

As she relayed her message, she was filled with pride and joy to present victory to her master and was brimming with the hope that he would lavish her with praise for a job well done...

"Master? Did you hear me? Master Takuto? Is something the mat—"

〈 ! 〉**COMMUNICATION ERROR**

An event is currently in progress.

Chat commands cannot be executed.

“...What?”

Flame Demon Flamin is a boss character that is extremely infamous among the players of *Brave Questers*, and many of them mention his name first when asked about the game. Not only that, but he has scored first place as the most hated enemy in every questionnaire given out by the game developer.

The reason for this is simple:

He's directly responsible for taking the life of someone important to the Hero.

Takuto's fatal mistake was about to rear its ugly head.

The time had come for him to pay for his optimism and take responsibility for his arrogance. The bill was going to be collected for him turning a blind eye to a rule, an event he actually knew about.

The wheels of fate spun at an accelerated speed.

Unbearable despair had crept up on him from behind.

Flame Demon Flamin

HP: 4,200 MP: 16,000

Attack: 22

Defense: 40

Magic: 55 Agility: 24

A cunning and ruthless demon responsible for the destruction of many villages. You mustn't ever let your guard down around him!

Flamin is one of the Demon Lord's Four Generals.

He's the most hated character within the Brave Questers series.

While he doesn't have any Ultimate Attacks, his normal attacks pack a punch, making it difficult to defeat him unless you level up your party members.

If possible, equip everyone with Fire Rings—they reduce fire damage—before taking him on.

Chapter 7: Crime and Punishment

SOMETHING strange and indescribable hung in the air. It was an abnormal presence that Isla struggled to define, but if she had to put it into words, it was like all organic matter throughout the world had been stirred together and left to rot. This disgusting presence wafted in from every direction.

Something bad is happening. That deadly premonition screamed nonstop from the depths of her very being, but she couldn't do anything about it without knowing what that *something* was.

What in...the world is going on?

Silence reigned. There was nothing strange near her. But the warning bells blaring in Isla's head since she'd defeated Flamin and lost the ability to contact Takuto had submerged her in a sea of panic, unlike anything she'd experienced before.

"...Huh?"

"Um, where are we?"

Two sweet voices that didn't belong suddenly broke the silence.

"...You girls! Why did you come here?!" Isla cried.

"Dunno."

"We were with His Majesty until a second ago... H-How did we get here?"

The Elfuur Sisters were standing where they shouldn't be. They were the Dark Elf twins who looked after Takuto and the young girls with a tragic past who Isla deeply cared for. They should have been evacuating with the other civilians. This was the last place they should be.

Isla suspected they were an illusion or fakes for a moment, but the information she received from her inhuman senses told her they were the real Elfuur Sisters.

They had been forcefully summoned to this spot by some game mechanic. Isla had no doubt they were in the middle of a fatal, ongoing event. As soon as she came to that conclusion, she was quick to make her next move.

“All my little children, protect the twins!”

Isla called for all the Larva and reserve Long-legged Bugs in the area. She also forced the unhatched eggs that had escaped being destroyed in the last battle to awaken.

But *nothing* happened.

“Brain Eaters! If you hear me, come to me now!!”

Isla tilted her head back to roar toward the skies for the Medics to come. She was trying to call them back from where they were dealing with other enemy forces within the forest.

But *nothing* happened.

“Great and mighty king! O wise Commander of our forces, Takuto Ira! Please answer me! Please respond to my call!”

Isla sent both a telepathic and an audible message to the person she trusted the most in the world and the only soul capable of getting them out of this pinch.

But *nothing* happened.

“Wh-Why?! Why can’t I get in touch with anyone?!”

“Are you hurting?” Maria asked.

“Oh no... What should Cary and Big Sista do...?” Caria asked.

Every action Isla took ended up futile, as if the very spot they stood had been ripped out of space and time. She tried to pull the twins close to escape with them, but when she moved her arm, some invisible force reset the movement, making it so it never happened.

Isla’s unease ballooned. She didn’t know what was happening, but she was certain that if she let things progress unchecked, she’d come to regret it.

Put simply, she was unable to take any action. She was locked into a forced

standby state until the event continued.

The twins anxiously looked up at her. Just as Isla reached out to pat them reassuringly on the heads with her forearms—

“Kuhehe! Kuhahaha! *GYAHAHAHAHA!*”

Jarring laughter forced the stagnated time to move once more. The owner of that grating voice was right before her. It was the same annoying voice she’d conversed with not that long ago. Immediately assessing her situation, Isla pierced the laughter—pierced Flamin—with the same agility of a praying mantis pouncing on its prey, her movements more fluid than seemingly possible for such a large body.

“*Yeeaaaah*, sorry, this thing can’t die.”

The man who should’ve died answered her.

As it was, his torso had been split clean in half, and Isla’s subsequent attack completely destroyed his skull. And yet, despite that, Flamin was talking just the same as before. Isla instinctively stepped back from the anomaly happening before her.

“How...? I know I killed you!”

In this single moment, she was so astonished at what happened that she lost her normal calm. She was in a situation where she couldn’t obtain instructions from Takuto. Without a clear course of action, time just passed by, frustrating her.

This was the moment it became clear just how powerless units from *Eternal Nations* are when they are completely isolated from their Commander.

“Yeah, I died. I’m as dead as can be. So dead, there’s no room for debate, botfly,” Flamin’s corpse spoke. His skull was cracked, his brains were spilling out, and his bulging eyeballs stared into empty space.

Death is inevitable for all living things. Even the undead will eventually find themselves stopped dead in their tracks.

And yet, that very dead man was talking about his unique situation as calmly as someone commenting on the weather.

“But *daaaamn*...it’s exactly as *it* said. This is a shitty world. A hell a shitty world where clumps of shit believe they’re alive and live out shitty lives.”

Isla ignored his monologue and stabbed Flamin’s corpse with yet another decisive move that should’ve finished him off.

〈 ! 〉**Auto-defend Enabled**

Protects key characters to continue the event.

But an invisible force field activated, preventing the attack as if to imply further destruction of the corpse wasn’t allowed.

“Buahaha! You can’t kill me... Since y’know, I’m already dead! *HAHAHA!*”

Flamin laughed. The mutilated corpse laughed.

For the first time since coming to this world—no, for the first time ever, including her experiences within *Eternal Nations*—Isla couldn’t grasp the true nature of the event taking place. Perhaps Takuto could’ve made an educated guess about what was happening, but her options were limited while she was locked out of communicating with her Commander.

“Mama...”

“Wh-What should we do? Um, is there anything we can do to help...?”

The Dark Elf twins anxiously clung to Isla. They were both noncombatant civilians—they didn’t have an astounding defense or exorbitant regeneration abilities like Isla. They were fragile little lives that could get hurt and die from the most trivial things. That fact worried Isla more than she had ever worried before.

But as their mother figure, she concealed all her worries behind a gentle smile as she soothingly addressed her girls.

“Goodness me, aren’t you the most precious little worrywarts?” she cooed. “It’s going to be all right, darlings. You are safe with me. Your Mama Isla will never let anything bad happen to you...”

But we can never fully protect our children from the cruelty of reality. Even more so when your reality is fodder for a story, and stories always seek out tragedy and misery to make their narrative all the more engaging...

Their situation was harrowing, to say the least.

“Somebody get me a tissue, you’re making my rotting corpse tear up!” Flamin sneered. “So heartwarming! Now that’s *love* for you! Okay, I’ve decided! It’s gotta be those two! Won’t that strike the best chord with ya? Wouldn’t ya say, monster?”

At first, Isla didn’t understand what he meant, but the events that followed made it abundantly clear. For some reason, the twin sisters staggered away from Isla’s bosom in the direction of Flamin’s corpse. It seemed so natural at first, that even Isla temporarily blanked out that it was a bad thing despite being on full alert to anything unusual.

“What are you girls doing?!” Isla shouted. “Hide behind me! Why are you walking that way?!”

“Ah... Huh? I didn’t mean to...” Maria said in a daze.

“Eh? Wh-Why?! My feet aren’t listening to me!” Caria cried.

Isla reached for them. The girls dug their feet into the ground and tried to retreat back to her.

But all their attempts to stop ended in vain.

Flamin’s shattered jaw clattered in a distorted laugh as his eyeless eye sockets fixed on the approaching girls.

“You can’t fight it, can ya? You can’t defy it, can ya? I’m about to tell you something good, so you’d better listen while you can. Your precious ones will die. They will absolutely, positively *die*. No matter how strong, mighty, or important they are, they *will* die. Yes, ya heard me right. They *WILL* die. Get it? Make sure to lemme know with a smile once your buggy pea brain processes that part.”

This was the moment Isla was convinced this was a forced game event. Mynoghra’s characters were influenced by *Eternal Nations’* game mechanics. Those mechanics could also affect beings outside the game, as proven by Takuto accepting the Dark Elves into Mynoghra as refugee citizens and then switching them from neutral to evil alignment.

With that in mind, the same should be true for other games in this world.

Clearly, something was causing the game mechanics from Flamin's *Brave Questers* to have complete control over what was happening to them. But even though Isla knew what was happening...

"Impossible! How is this happening?! It doesn't make sense! It just doesn't! This can't be happening!"

...she just couldn't accept the unreasonableness of it all.

In their worlds, might made right. Power was everything. This power could be anything from the basic concepts of military might and physical prowess to more indirect forms, such as knowledge and wealth. The only one and true rule was that the people with the power acquire everything and have their way in the end, while the powerless experience the agony of being robbed of all they have. It was an absolute rule because of its simplicity.

And that was exactly why she couldn't accept the event happening now.

Isla immediately came to the conclusion that this event was triggered by Flamin's death. But she was the one who'd won their battle. If winning meant she was forced to face such a dire crisis, then what was the point of power in the first place? Was there even a point in winning when her fate was sealed regardless of her actions?

"*Yeaaaaah*, I get how you're feelin'. There are some things you just can't change no matter how hard you struggle. But I ain't too upset knowing that I can see your ugly mug twist with your suffering at the end like this."

Isla paid no attention to the gleeful gloating coming from Flamin's smashed face. His baiting was the least of her concerns now. For Isla was the only one capable of saving the two girls from the brink of death now that they'd all been cut off from their Commander and king, Takuto.

Isla struggled against the invisible force binding her in place with all her might and then some. But it was futile.

"*GUUH! GAH! GRAAAAAAAAAAAAAH!!* Don't think you can restrain me with something like thiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiis!!"

“Okay, botfly, I’ll give you one last tip. Make sure you hear this. You see...I call this shitty mechanic...”

In this world, there are some things that can’t be overturned or changed no matter how hard you try. Those are called...

“...Forced Story Events,” Flamin finished.

The true nature of this hopeless situation was steadily proceeding against their will.

“...I don’t know what world you came from, but I can tell it was freer than the world I’m from.”

Flamin almost sounded philosophic as he spoke. Isla found herself intuitively listening to him despite her intense impatience and explosive emotions because there was an echo of sympathy within his voice that resounded clearly in her ears.

“But did ya know? There are these events that are scripted to be unavoidable no matter how hard you try to get around them. Puppets like us can never escape from that destiny. There’s but one thing we can do—give up.”

Isla didn’t know what he had seen and lived through before now. She didn’t know how he’d struggled and eventually came to give up on resisting at all. But she could never accept having that same fate forced upon her. She could never just nod and give up because someone said she was destined to.

“Mama... Wh-What do we do?”

“Mama Isla! H-Help us...!”

There was no way in hell she was going to give up in front of her girls.

Because Isla was a mother, and her beloved daughters needed her help.

“AaaaaaaaaaaaaAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAH!!!”

Her muscles rumbled like beating drums. Massive amounts of power rampaged within her body with no way to be released, her carapace that was stronger than steel cracked, and green blood poured out. And still, Isla didn’t stop fighting the invisible force.

“Yeah! That’s right! They’re important to you, aren’t they? You want to protect them, don’t you?! You can’t let this happen, can you?! Good luck! Fight back! Maybe a miracle will happen! Though it’s never happened before!”

The distance between Flamin’s corpse and the twins was like grains of sand falling in an hourglass counting down to the guillotine, and with each step the girls took, the greater the sense of doom became.

“It’s impossible. It’s *damn* impossible to stop... Once you get this far, it’s game over. Bang, you’re done. I typically get the Hero when he lets down his guard thinking I’m dead, but it seems like this world doesn’t care about the small details.”

The girls turned just their heads toward Isla and exchanged looks with her. Was that something enforced by the game event? Or did they realize they could move their upper bodies and did so as a last means of resistance?

Isla offered the terrified girls the sweetest, most motherly smile in the world.

“It’s all right, sweeties... I will save you. No matter what it takes. I will.”

Isla strained power through her immobilized body and tried every skill at her disposal. She frantically racked her brain for a way out but only became further frustrated by the lack of ideas.

“*Aaaah*, every last one of them’s a friggen idiot!” Flamin raved. “They’re all functioning under the false assumption that they’ve got a will of their own, a conviction to fight for, that they’re acting based on what *they* want!”

The girls took one step closer.

“The Hero, the Demon Lord, and everyone and everything else think that way, never realizing that they’re being deceived! They haven’t the damndest clue that they’re pawns on a game board that’ll be tossed into the trash the moment they don’t work how they’re supposed to!”

Another step closer.

“Haven’t I done enough?” he continued with a hint of pleading in his tone now. “Can’t I be put to rest now? I did my best. I did enough. I fulfilled my damn *role*!”

Another step closer.

“You can all just go to hell! Stop making me the butt of your jokes! Does my life only exist as a bump along the way in the Hero’s story? That’s friggen screwed up!”

Each step brought them ever closer to the end of the road.

No one was listening to Flamin’s monologue anymore. Isla, the Elfuur Sisters, and even Takuto Ira, who’d detected the anomaly there, were doing their best to avert the tragedy that would soon come.

Did Flamin understand no one was listening to him, or was he just too angry to think straight? Whatever the reasoning, he directed his hissed curses at *something* not there.

“*You* too! I know you’re listening, dammit! You’re watching, aren’t you?! Why the hell did you say ‘You will become free if you conquer the world’ when you never planned on keeping your damn promise! *Huuuuuuuh?!’*”

There wasn’t anyone around with the wherewithal to pay Flamin and his comments any attention. Or perhaps...there was one person who had, but there was no way to know for sure. At the very least, the actors participating in this event couldn’t have.

“And there you have it! This is the closing act!” Flamin shouted at them again. “I’m draggin’ the lot of you down the road to hell with me. Your precious little kiddos are comin’ with me too! You can hear me, can’t you, *King* Takuto Ira? You’re a bloody *player* too, aren’t you? You read all about our story somewhere just like that *person*, didn’t you? Did you have fun thinking stuff like ‘Oh, I’d better craft some new equipment after defeating this boss’ while you watched me fighting for my life against the damn Hero?”

No one answered him.

“Screw you! I exist! This is where I live! I’m friggen alive! That’s why I’m gonna make you pay in the worst way I can! I’ll kill the ones you care about most! Because that’s the kind of screwed up event this *iiiiiiiiisssssss!*”

Flamin was laughing. He roared with laughter like a madman. There wasn’t even a shell of the man known for his cunning ruthlessness—only the grief of a

pitiful creature who cursed his fate and despised his life was left. He didn't even know if this was how he really wanted to behave. All he knew for sure was that the event was playing out how he'd hoped it would.

At long last, the two girls arrived in front of the cackling corpse. Their faces had crumpled with the fear of dying, and tears poured from their big eyes. Not only Caria but even Maria, who rarely showed an emotional reaction to anything, was reduced to frightened sobs.

The sisters who'd cursed their lot in life and always longed for death found themselves paralyzed with fear when they were finally faced with it. Or rather, they had grown terrified of dying now that they'd experienced the warmth and affection of their new family and mother. Their experience starkly contrasted with the man before them, who also cursed his lot in life but never found someone who understood him. Not even once.

There was a clicking noise as a flag was raised. It wasn't heard by anyone or understood by anyone, it just signaled that the end had come and that their fate had been sealed.

Death comes equally to all.

Despair comes equally to all.

Even monsters existing outside the realms of the imaginable are equally susceptible. Those two things can never be escaped.

"Wait! Please! Don't!" Isla screamed at the top of her lungs with a sliver of hope that it'd do something.

"Nu-uh! Ain't waiting! Not for you! I hate you! I hate all of you! That's why this is my parting gift! You'd better enjoy it! GyahahaHAHAHAHAHA!!"

Hope as we may, reality is ruthless.

"Mama Is—" the girls cried for their mother.

Flamin's corpse shined for a moment before an explosive flame with an indescribable amount of heat and destructive power consumed everything. The whole area turned to ash, and the burning hot wind became a storm that blew everything away. The already devastated land was further razed to the ground

like a bomb had gone off for the second time in the same spot, and a mushroom cloud of dust blocked out the sun, bringing about night during the day.

Splintered chunks of charred wood rained down, and the scorched air quietly swayed.

Eventually, true stillness reigned with no one claiming victory...

The story event came to a close, with everything happening exactly as it was scripted without the slightest deviation whatsoever.

Chapter 8: That which can Never Return

“**YOU** don’t have to come with me...you know?” Atou crabbily told Elder Moltar and Mynoghra’s soldiers, who followed behind her as she bounded through the craggy wasteland strewn with the occasional jagged boulder.

She ran at superhuman speeds. The power unleashed from her slender legs was enough to crack the dry ground under her feet, and each stride took her across vast distances. Although the Dark Elves had become evil beings with Mynoghra’s blessing, they were still Humanoid at their core. They were only able to somewhat keep up with Atou because she was slaughtering every *Brave Questers’* monster along the way.

Her tentacles had a much wider attack range than met the eye. Not to mention the number of enemies they could lock onto at once... Dozens of monsters were split in half with a single flick of the tentacle, and even more were skewered through the skull by a single thrust. Elder Moltar felt a pinch of pity for his enemy as Atou knocked the monsters around the field to vent her anger.

“...You’re still here?”

She directed her irritation toward Elder Moltar next. She spun toward him with a look that could kill and an intimidating air that warned one wrong word, and he’d end up with one of those swaying tentacles through his heart. This was the intense pressure emitted by the inhuman—by beings known as Hero units.

Gut twisting with nervous tension, Elder Moltar answered her deadly query with a measured tone that wouldn’t incite her wrath.

“His Majesty ordered me to advance with you. I may not be of any use, but I cannot defy the king’s orders.”

“*Hmph*. Then don’t slow me down.”

“Yes, ma’am!”

Did Atou lose interest in skewering him? Or did more entertaining prey catch

her eye? Either way, she moodily looked away from Elder Moltar and stormed down the road per her instructions. It seemed there was no shortage of enemies for her to take her anger out on if the endless chorus of monster death throes coming from up ahead was any indication.

“E-Elder Moltar...”

“Don’t say it. I know.”

One of the Mage apprentices under Elder Moltar whispered his name. Elder Moltar knew exactly what the apprentice wanted to say and quickly cut him off before he uttered such dangerous words. It didn’t matter if they spoke in barely audible whispers—the person they were talking about could hear them. Elder Moltar didn’t have a hobby of earning unwarranted wrath that ended in his death as a miserable punching bag.

What anger... I feel like I’ll get burned alive just standing beside her... Elder Moltar contemplated what he wouldn’t allow to be said aloud. Atou’s mood grew caustic after she’d defeated the enemy general, Ice Rock. Or, to be more precise, it soured after she’d delivered the news to their king, Takuto Ira.

From that conversation, they learned about the enemy’s violent invasion of Mynoghra’s Imperial Capital. The news was enough to shock all of Mynoghra’s forces in Dragontan and fill them with a strong sense of impending crisis.

Mynoghra was still a far cry from being a powerful empire yet, and that was coupled with the detrimental fact that a good portion of its military forces were currently deployed to Dragontan. Just because Isla, another Hero unit, was handling the capital’s defenses didn’t guarantee they were out of the woods yet. To make matters worse, there were a lot of civilians there too. If their defenses were overrun by sheer numbers, then not only would harm come to their defenseless citizens, but it could even endanger their king.

These personally insulting events transformed Atou’s fanatical loyalty and concern for Takuto into unbridled rage.

“I need to hurry to King Takuto’s side right away, but this filth keeps getting in my WAY!”

Atou effortlessly cut down the Hill Giant that grimly approached them with

the knowledge that escape was futile. She'd already grown so strong that Hill Giants couldn't even get close enough to land an attack, and all the monsters she was actively slaying were surrendering their strength to her in the form of experience points. These very monsters were what had caused her to fly into a fit of rage.

After being shaken by the news that Mynoghra's main base was under attack, Atou had offered to immediately return home to join Isla in defending the capital and eliminating their enemy, but Takuto rejected her proposal. He instead commanded her to hunt down the retreating enemy forces to the far south of Dragontan, where she was to defeat the Demon Lord and the remnants of his army that they believed had spawned from that location.

With his knowledge of *Brave Questers*, Takuto thought it'd be possible for Atou to completely annihilate the Demon Lord's Army, given the difference in strength between her and the Demon Lord's Four Generals.

Ultimately, he had prioritized eliminating the Demon Lord's Army sooner rather than later to avoid any unexpected developments that might occur by letting them live longer. How did Atou feel when he told her, "I'm placing Isla in charge of defending Mynoghra and me"?

Naturally, there was no room for her to argue. After hearing his explanation, she'd determined there was nothing wrong with his strategy based on his choice of Hero or allocation of forces. However, just because she understood the reasoning behind his strategy didn't mean she agreed with it.

As it was, the Hero Atou was far more attached to Takuto Ira than to her empire. She was strongly against operating separately when her master was in danger because Takuto mattered more to her than anything else. Even if it was he himself who had ordered her away...

She wanted nothing more than to immediately return to her king, protect him with her own hands, and crush their vile enemies herself. She wanted to fulfill her role as Hero alongside Isla.

But reality didn't coincide with her wishes. Takuto had chosen a different strategy. Takuto had chosen a *different* Hero.

Her mental turmoil and frustration over that decision manifested as pure

rage, and the pitiful monsters were mercilessly slaughtered as an outlet for her unbridled anger.

There are no IFs in history.

Redoes are possible in games but not in real life.

So it's a moot point to rehash what's already transpired. No one can ever say for sure whether things would've been completely different IF Takuto had ordered Atou back to Mynoghra instead...

"I-It can't be..."

It happened suddenly—really, really suddenly.

Atou stopped dead in her raging tracks and started to tremble.

"...Hrm? Lady Atou, is something wrong?"

Elder Moltar was obviously the first to sense something was wrong. He'd been keeping a decent distance from Atou to avoid becoming an outlet for her anger, so he didn't know what exactly had happened, but he knew something had changed.

The sun had already begun to set and the hour was approaching dusk. The orange sunlight illuminated Atou in red from behind, almost making her look like she'd just bathed in blood.

Elder Moltar took a step closer to the inhuman girl and was about to speak to her again, when— "Everyone, get down! Hide behind the rocks!"

—he noticed the danger a second before it was too late.

"It just can't be! It can't be! It can't be! It can't be! That's impossible! That can't possibly happen!"

The ground exploded.

Atou's tentacles whipped around wildly to express her outrage. They whooshed around furiously, smashing everything that had shape with the same ease as a child playing jump rope.

"She's a *Hero*! *Mynoghra's* Hero! How could she?! At this point in the game?!"

The Dark Elves who dove behind the nearby boulders in the nick of time were lucky. It almost seemed like a blessing from the Spirits that there were even boulders around this particular area for them to hide behind.

As the stones swept into the air rained down like bullets, Elder Moltar thanked the Spirits for his luck while he loudly admonished Atou's outburst. It was obvious that if he didn't do anything, even the rocks protecting them would eventually be carved away, leaving them exposed to her violent attacks.

"Please quell your anger, our great hero! Your power is meant to be wielded for Mynoghra's King Takuto Ira, not wasted on something like this!"

Atou's fury had ballooned to the point where she would've destroyed everything around her. One wrong word could've resulted in not only Elder Moltar but every Dark Elf with him being erased from existence.

Only two words had stopped the rampaging Hero—Takuto Ira.

The name of her one true master, to whom she devoted her everything, pulled her out of her fit of rage and returned her to the edge of calm.

"...I lost my composure a moment there," she weakly muttered and relaxed as if her outburst had never happened. Her rampaging tentacles now hung limply in the air until they eventually slithered back within her.

After cautiously observing that Atou was once again in control of her rage, Elder Moltar determined they had escaped certain death, let out a sigh, and signaled his subordinates closer. Calm had returned to her crimson eyes, meaning it was safe to assume that Mynoghra's Hero wouldn't recklessly take out her wrath on her allies now. That being said, none of them would ever be able to forget the carnage they had just witnessed...

Awkward silence reigned as the gathered Dark Elves anxiously stared at Atou.

"What...in the Spirits happened?" Elder Moltar bravely asked her.

Tension filled the air.

This was the first time he'd ever seen Atou lose control this badly, and it was also the first time he'd witnessed her in such depressed spirits. It was obvious that something terrible had happened. It was possible to guess what that was

from some of the words she'd uttered during her outburst. But just because his intelligence had led him to that conclusion didn't mean that his heart had accepted it.

He needed to hear it directly from Atou to believe it.

"Isla has..."

The name of the Hero every person present knew slipped from her lips, and just like that, everyone knew what words would follow.

"Isla has died."

She finally squeezed those three words out, her expression twisting with anguish.

The death of Isla, one of Mynoghra's Heroes.

The defeat of a Hero who was the empire's sword and a symbol of power for the King of Ruin.

Not a single soul standing there could accept that news.



"...WHAA?"

Takuto let out an awfully stupid-sounding croak. He was in one of the recently constructed houses turned into a temporary command center since it didn't have a tenant yet. He'd moved his base of operations to this house near the evacuation center because it was hard to defend the Palace where he usually resided. Fortunately, no one overheard him.

"No way...this can't be happening..."

Change came suddenly, like a bolt out of the blue.

Takuto had been watching the course of events with the twins. He fully demonstrated his ability as a 4x strategy game player by checking the status of each battle, assigning soldiers tasks, informing Isla of her opponent's characteristics and skills, and then laying out the path to victory for her. The battle played out exactly how he'd simulated it, and the moves he'd made like a master solving a chess problem eventually came together in the form of Isla's

victory.

Just when he was about to contact Isla to reflect on what they could've done better after reaching the obvious result with no problems whatsoever after taking the safest route... His connection to Isla was severed, and the two girls at his side had vanished.

It was already too late by the time he'd realized something had gone wrong.

"Isla, answer me..."

All communication was severed. He couldn't share Isla's vision, which was normally as easy as seeing with his own two eyes. The last image he'd received was of the twins being summoned to her location. He could tell the conversation was a turbulent one. Next, he tried to send telepathic messages and connect his vision with the Larva and Brain Eaters in the area, but that failed too.

Mynoghra's Commander Takuto Ira could see through the eyes of all his citizens, including the twins who served as his caretakers...

He hastily tried connecting with the older sister.

No response.

Then he tried the younger sister.

No response.

"C-Come on... This can't be real. What's going on? Why...? Is something jamming our connection? *Agh*, but they're in a pinch. I-I need to send reinforcements first..."

His voice quivered. He hoped he was wrong and tried reconnecting.

He attempted to send another telepathic message to Isla.

He attempted to send a telepathic message to the units under his command.

He attempted to send a telepathic message to the sisters.

He kept telling himself it'd be okay. That there was no way they'd die in such an unreasonable way.

First, I need to confirm they're okay, then I'll apologize, he thought. *Then I*

need to earn their forgiveness for letting them get hurt because I'm such a feckless fool who let his guard down. And then I'll immediately send reinforcements to save them. I'll save them...

〈 ! 〉**Communication Error Unit does not exist.**

“You gotta be kidding me...”

The past can't be changed. The decision he made came back to bite him.

“Isla, Caria, Maria...”

He pathetically uttered their names as that was all he could do.

This world wasn't a game.

It wasn't *Eternal Nations*.

There was no reset or loading.

If you die, you're dead. That's it.

And because of that, this was a reality Takuto had to accept.

A reality he couldn't change. A route he couldn't divert.

On this day, someone Takuto loved was lost from the world.

SYSTEM MESSAGE

Isla, Queen of Bugs has been destroyed.
~One threat has been removed from the world.~

OK

Chapter 9: Lamentation

BEFORE the Demon Lord's Army invasion event took place, two young girls gazed up at the night sky from the top of a giant tree.

"What a biiiiiig moon."

"It feels like forever since we last saw the moon, huh?"

Mynoghra's forest had become Cursed Terrain under the influence of the civilization's Distinct Traits. The gnarled trees twisted in unnatural directions, making it difficult to climb or secure satisfactory footholds. But climbing such trees was child's play to the Children of the Forest—Elves and the closely related Dark Elves. Climbing the tallest giant trees on the city outskirts was like going for a stroll through the neighborhood for them.

...That being said, given the age and government position the two young girls held, it was a serious problem for them to be loafing around in the treetops at this late hour. They were in for a real scolding if the overprotective, worrywart Hero Isla, who'd become an adoptive mother to them, found out. So sneaking out like this was a small but thrilling adventure for the sisters. The peaceful and happy lives they'd been living recently had made the girls brave, and just a little daring.

The scenery seen from the treetops was drastically different from what they saw on the ground. A poisonous-looking sea of trees spread out in every direction, blanketing the land, while the cloudless night sky shimmered and sparkled like a child had emptied the contents of a treasure chest on a black rug.

The most remarkable sight was the huge moon that illuminated the whole area like the sun and shone down on them with a mercifully tender light. They had set out on this little nighttime adventure to find that light from Mynoghra's Palace.

“The moon is beautiful, isn’t it?”

Caria was captivated by the beauty of the moon she hadn’t seen in a long time, when her older sister made that confusing comment. The moon was certainly smiling at them encouragingly with its bright and beautiful light. But Maria’s comment sounded more like a set phrase than a casual remark.

“The moon is *beautiful*, but...what did you mean by that, Big Sista?” she asked.

“*Mm?* His Majesty told me that if you say ‘The moon is beautiful, isn’t it?’ that it can mean ‘I love you.’” Maria faced her younger sister with a rare, tender smile.

When did those two have that conversation? It was sparked by their king gazing up at the moon and muttering “Huh, the moon is here too” like it was a curious thing to him. Already on friendly terms with King Takuto by this point, Maria let her curiosity lead her into asking him about it, and she got that anecdote in place of an answer.

He dodged the question, she understood in her own way, but the story he’d told her was so interesting and entertaining that it stayed with her positively rather than leave her dissatisfied. And that was exactly why those words had spilled from her lips when she looked upon such a gorgeous moon.

“Wow! I’ve never heard that before!” Caria exclaimed. “His Majesty’s a walking dictionary!”

“Yeah. I learned about it for the first time from him. His Majesty knows everything.”

The secret moment she had shared with her precious king, she then shared with her equally precious little sister. Seeing her sister’s eyes sparkle with glee the same way hers had when she first heard that anecdote brought a real smile to Maria’s usually unreadable face. Her cherubic smile was like any other girl her age, and it seemed to make the twins forget that they had survived till this day, harboring a sad and painful past.

The twins were gradually starting to heal from their trauma since becoming Mynoghra’s citizens and the king’s caretakers... It wasn’t easy to overcome the

trauma of having eaten their mother in order to survive their endless journey on the run from the other species who'd chased the Dark Elves out of their own land.

Their mother had suggested it herself as a way to save her people from starvation. It was both a self-sacrificial act for her people and also a kind of transaction she'd made to ensure her blighted children would have their position secured within the clan rather than just leaving them to die because they would slow down the group.

The girls had realized the darker, bleaker reason for their mother's sacrifice because they were wiser than their years. Ultimately, it resulted in Maria closing off her heart and Caria boldly showing off the deep scars left by the plague as a way of forever punishing herself.

It's no surprise then why Elder Moltar and the other Mynoghra empire-management council members were reluctant to introduce the twins to Takuto as caretaker candidates. The young twins were living proof of the abominable sins the Dark Elves had committed by eating their clansmen, and they felt too guilty to display those sins in front of their king by introducing the girls to him. And more than anything else, those girls were beyond broken at the time.

However, those painful events were already a thing of the past.

The twins, who were finally able to feel at peace under the king's patronage, gradually came to terms with the past and became capable of living in the present. This was, of course, thanks to the efforts of King Takuto Ira and the rest of his council.

However, for the two girls who wanted nothing more than to die to atone for what they believed were their sins, it was the existence of none other than the Hero Isla that helped them to recover in the truest sense of the word.

"Hey! Big Sista! When did you get the chance to hear such a lovely thing from His Majesty without me?!" Caria whined.

"Hm? When was it? That's my little secret!"

"Ahh! You won't tell me? You big meanie!"

Giggling over her sister's cute protests, Maria shifted her gaze back to the

moon. How wonderful it was to comment on the beauty of the moon and one's love in the same statement. How kind and great their king was to secretly tell her about it.

Just looking up at the giant moon seemed to grant the twins a mysterious new strength, and a smile spread across their faces as happy feelings bubbled up within them. They had no doubt they were going to become even happier from here. They thoroughly believed the world would smile upon them for all the suffering they'd been through. How could they think otherwise when the moon was so beautiful?

They were certain this was proof the world was telling them that it loved them. They were going to live happily forever and ever with their loved ones—King Takuto, Mama Isla, the Dark Elves—in their favorite land of Mynoghra. They were going to live life to its fullest for all the people who'd died and their deceased mother, who told them they must survive.

They were going to live happily ever after, just like the ending line in all the fairy tales their mother used to tell them...

When she thought about it like that, Maria's heart, which had been frozen by past events, steadily defrosted, leaving her feeling like she was on cloud nine for the first time.

"Caria, the moon is beautiful, isn't it?"

So she took her younger sister's hand in hers and told her that special phrase. Caria looked a little surprised by the abruptness, but a smile blossomed on her face like a sunflower the moment she realized the double meaning behind her words, and she squeezed her big sister's hand with rosy red cheeks.

"*Ehehe*, the moon is very beautiful, Big Sista!"

"Tehehe."

"Ehehe."

The two girls burst into giggles.

The double meaning behind that phrase was usually reserved for men and women who were romantically attracted to each other, but girls their age didn't

typically catch onto the subtleties of it until later in life. Although it was mostly Takuto's fault for skimping on the explanation because it was embarrassing...

At any rate, although they weren't using it quite as it was originally intended, the phrase was still perfect for conveying how much the sisters loved each other. And comparing the beauty of the moon to one's love for a family member was perfectly apt in this place where only the starry sky and a sea of trees were around to hear them.

"I know!" Caria clapped her hands together, the moon's tender light delivering a marvelous idea to her. "Let's bring Mama Isla with us next time. And then! And then we can tell her 'The moon is beautiful, isn't it?!'"

"Ooooooh! Let's! Let's!"

Their eyes sparkled as if they'd just struck upon the most wonderful of ideas. Just the look on their faces showed what telling Isla that phrase meant to them. Isla was their second mother. Of course, they never forgot the mother who gave birth to them. They were able to survive and find such happiness because their first mother gave up her life for them.

Never for a moment would they forget her warmth and love. At the same time, they weren't blind to the sheer amount of love and affection Isla poured into them and their broken, closed-off hearts. They didn't know why a powerful Hero like Isla cared for them so. But there was no denying the warmth they felt when they were gently hugged by those monstrous forearms that should've only known how to reap death and destruction.

"Tehehe! I just know it'll be an even better day than today!"

When was the next full moon? They couldn't wait for that day to come.

How much more beautiful would the moon be when all three of them looked upon it together? Just imagining it got Caria so excited that she couldn't sit still, and she stood up.

"Keep it a secret till then, 'kay?"

"Okay, Big Sista!"

"...Tehehe."

“...Ehehe.”

The girls giggled some more.

They were going to bring their beloved mother to this spot on the next full moon. They might get scolded for staying up late, but this was Mama Isla they were talking about—she would forgive them no matter how much she nagged them.

The sisters were going to take in the moon together with their mother. And the girls were going to tell their dear, dear mother those all-important words.

“I love you.”

They believed that day would become the most special of all days.



WHEN the twin sisters next opened their eyes...they were surrounded by a sea of blood.

“NOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOO!”

“MAMA!!”

Even after the enormous blast from Flamin’s self-destruct blew everything away, including the very ground, the twins and their mother were still alive.

No, that wasn’t quite right—it was a bittersweet miracle that Isla was still breathing as she was so far gone, death was inevitable. Her carapace, which was stronger than steel, had been burnt to the point it was melting off her body like wax dripping from a burning candle. About half of her giant body that had produced so much power to break free of the event’s shackles had been destroyed beyond recognition.

It was too tragic a sight to call fortunate, but at the very least, her head had escaped injury, and a weak *gichigichi* moan came from her chattering jaw. Her consciousness seemed to have finally returned as she raised her head with painfully slow movement compared to usual and dropped her gaze to confirm the wellbeing of the girls she held protectively in her arms like a mother shielding her children from a bomb blast.



“A-Are you...okay...Mama?”

What she received in response was a sobbing question from her girls. Their faces were covered in soot, and their expressions were crumpled with messy tears, but Isla was able to confirm they were safe and sound. That fact alone filled her with the greatest sense of relief any mother can feel.

Isla felt she needed to save these two girls no matter the cost. Because to her...they were daughters in all the ways that matter.

Why? Isla had never had a child before now.

Isla was a being who existed within the game of *Eternal Nations*. The Larva she spawned were indeed her children, but that was a part of the game system. They were simply assigned to her by the game’s settings—that was different from *real* children.

Even the Larva she spawned after being summoned to this world were more like insentient robots than children, and the fact was that they were more like drones with a swarm-mentality than thinking and feeling organisms. Putting it in terms that appeal to human sensibilities: they were far from anything that could be compared to a real feeling and breathing child.

...Isla fully understood that she was just game data. Even if she was given a cool-sounding name like Isla, Queen of Bugs, she was just a fictional existence created by “ones and zeroes.”

Was that why, as a character written with queenlike, mothering qualities, she searched high and low for an object to truly mother since coming to this world? She sought a weak existence she could protect and love, who would respond to her when she gave it attention.

So it made sense why the twin girls, who relied on her and loved her like she was their real mother, had become her irreplaceable treasures. So precious, she would lay down her own life to protect them.

“You are safe, little ones? I’m glad...truly glad... So...please...listen to wh-what I’m about...to tell you...”

“Talk later! You’re bleeding—!”

“Y-Yeah! We need to hurry and have His Majesty and the Birdbrains heal you!”

“I am...f-fine...”

Isla wrung the last vestiges of her strength to speak to the girls while the phantom of death walked ever closer to claim her. The cold, hard truth was that Isla could have survived if she'd surrendered the girls to their death. All she had to do was immediately put distance between them with her extraordinary abilities and enter defense mode. If she had, *Eternal Nations'* system would've intervened and made it so she only took limited damage regardless of how powerful and vicious Flamin's event was in *Brave Questers*.

But very few mothers are okay with surviving at the cost of their own children.

Does blood prove the bond between parent and child? Does the amount of time spent together prove the bond between parent and child? No, even if they weren't blood-related, even if their time together was short...those girls were Isla's daughters, and Isla was absolutely a mother to them.

“You girls are smart enough to know that...it's t-too late...for me. That's why...there's something I want to entrust to you...”

She had too little time left. And too few options available to her. Suppressing her desire to scream and cry that this wasn't how things were supposed to end, Isla frantically anchored her consciousness for as long as necessary to pass on the things her girls needed to survive without her.

“No, no, *NO!!* We'll be good! We'll do everything you tell us! So, so, please, Mama! *Mama!!*”

“I-Isn't there anything we can—”

“Unfortunately, t-time is not on our side...m-my dears.”

“It's because Cary and Big Sista are too weak! Because we tried to become happy! We're being punished again for trying to be happy!”

“Why? Why does everybody die? All we want is to be together. Is it such a bad thing to say we wanna be with our mommies? Did we do such a bad thing?”

Are we bad girls?”

Isla wanted to scream to the high heavens that that wasn’t true. But she no longer had the strength to do even that much for them. Her life was already as fleeting as a flickering flame before a powerful gust of wind, and she had something she must do before her light was extinguished.

“Let us die with you, Mama. We can’t take it... We can’t take the pain anymore...”

“There’s no reason to keep on living. There’s nothing good about being alive. Just pain and more pain and more pai—”

“Please...listen to m-my...last words...”

“.....”

Isla’s greatest wish was to keep her girls alive. She needed to do whatever it took to send them somewhere safe—somewhere away from this hopeless situation they found themselves in. The three of them were currently standing at the frontlines of the war between the Demon Lord’s Army and Mynoghra’s army.

Flamin might’ve blown everything away by self-destructing, but that didn’t guarantee the Brain Eaters and the Dark Elves would show up before forces from *Brave Questers* did. If anything, there was a greater danger of some of *Brave Questers’* infinitely respawning monsters coming there first to investigate.

That was why Isla had only one risky move left to rely on.

“I have a favor to ask of you two—”

“Eeyaugh!”

The girls screamed at the top of their lungs because their mother suddenly stabbed her remaining raptorial forearm into her chest and gouged out her own heart. They immediately understood what Isla wanted them to do...

“BLEAAAAAAAAGH!!”

“Heee, haaaahhh, pheee, haaaahhh...”

Caria retched and Maria began hyperventilating. What Isla was asking them to do brought back their greatest trauma and most horrific, haunting memories.

They had once heard about how, among the many skills Isla could acquire, there was one that allowed her to pass her abilities on to another...and how the inheritor of those abilities had to first eat her heart for it to work...

In *Eternal Nations*, it was just an immemorable subskill that could heroize another nearby unit when Isla was defeated. But the emotional toll it would have on the successor in reality was indescribable. Their pain would be even greater the more they loved her...

"Please forgive your mother for leaving this world before you...and, this is my final request... Please eat me and live long strong lives."

"No! No, no, NO, NO, NOOOO!"

"Why? *Sob, hiccup, sob...* Whyyyyyy...?"

Isla understood how deep of a wound her actions were going to cause them. But she had no other choice despite knowing she was scarring her daughters. Even though she understood she was hurting them, she wanted her precious children to survive regardless.

"You will be all right, for you are my adorable daughters..."

Master Takuto...I'm sorry. Please forgive me for acting without your permission.

Isla acquired a skill without the king's approval.

〈 ! 〉

Isla, Queen of Bugs has leveled up and acquired the following skills:

《Demise of the Crown》

Demise of the Crown is a skill that allows the unit to pass on the Hero trait to another unit from the same empire upon their demise. A final gift to be passed on before they die.

"Demise of the Crown, to my precious daughters, Maria and Caria. To you, I bequeath all of my power."

Isla handed over her still-beating heart. Its pale, flickering magic luminance shined all the brighter when placed in the girls' hands. Before long, the light grew dimmer like a candle about to be extinguished...

"...Live free, my dear daughters."

...and with her final words, the light of life that had been Hero Isla went out.

"...I love you."

"MAMAAAAA!!!!!" both girls wailed.

The twins knew just how miserable and painful it was to live at the expense of a mother. They'd already experienced the suffering of a lifetime going through it once before, and yet now they had to experience it all over again.

But their beloved mothers told them, wished of them, to live. To go on living because they are loved.

And so, the two young girls...

...yet again found themselves feasting upon their mother...



...**FOR** all intents and purposes, the event from *Brave Questers* was still playing out.

There was more to the story than Flamin could've known because he was always defeated by the Hero and died in the process. In the game, it's the Hero's teacher who raised him like his own child, who dies at the hands of Flamin's wicked plan. This father figure is a brave and noble man who constantly joins and leaves the Hero's party from the very beginning of his adventures, and it's his powerful abilities that occasionally lead the Hero to impossible victories.

And he's the one who gives up his life to protect the Hero, who he loves like a son.

The Hero laments his loss and despairs. But the words his teacher imparts in his dying moments help the Hero stand back up again. Just like that, he inherits his teacher's will and strength, inciting even stronger resolve within him to save the world. The strength he inherits at this stage prepares him to eventually

defeat the Demon Lord and bring peace to the world once more.

His is a tale of love, courage, and carrying on the wishes of those who were lost along the way.

Then what would happen if an evil person was put in the Hero's shoes?

What if that person was already despondent over their circumstances and had the peace and tranquility they'd finally grasped cruelly ripped from them?

What if, in a moment of helplessness and despair, they were forced not just once but twice to eat their mother?

What if it were young girls who were blessed by the King of Ruin and inherited the will and wishes of the queen of monsters?

The event couldn't be stopped.

If no one was allowed to save them, then it only makes sense that there was no convenient way to save the world from giving birth to something so...*lethal*.

The chaos of various thoughts and feelings jumbling together became a huge, unstoppable swell that filled the world.

< ! >

The Hero—ERROR—has awakened to true power!!

Promoting the status of the target character.

.....

The target character's profile settings are abnormal.

Canceling promoti—

The proCEss has bEEen intERvened by ■■■■

Continuing status promotion.

Activating <<Demise of the Crown>>

Granting the Distinct Trait <<Hero>> to the target.

—ERROR— Awakening process has been duplicated.

—ERROR— Process cannot be executed normally.

—EHRRRRRR... Awakening is complete.

Even if there were someone out there who knew everything there is to know about the world, they would've had a hard time predicting this result. Even if there were a godlike being out there, they would've struggled to prophesize this. Things had become so intertwined by this point that the world was about to give birth to an abomination of unknown origins.

—And just like that, the eggs of hatred had hatched.

Was it a mother's love that made it happen? Or was it a mother's insanity? Phenomena that would normally be impossible continued, overwhelming the world's warning system to push through a mother's greatest wish. The purity of that wish made it unstoppable.

The world is always cruel.

It always hated those girls and wished misfortune and despair upon them. But it is also cruelly *fair*. Thus, that cruel, cruel world fairly granted the twins the power to plunge everything equally into hell with them...



TWO small shadows sat in that place where everything had ended. They slowly stood and gazed up at the night sky. It blessed their rebirth from little weaklings who always needed to be protected to beings with the power to see their desires through and spread their hatred throughout the world.

The first time these girls tasted utter despair, it broke them.

The second time they tasted the bitterness of despair...

SYSTEM MESSAGE

※ Emergency Notification ※

A new Threat has emerged in the world.

Witches of Regret, the Elfuur Sisters

~Fear the moonlit night.

Dread the little girls who suffer from regret.

Their hatred and sorrow won't ever go away,

Until the world is burned away in eternal gray.~

OK

Chapter 10: Chaos

AFTER he confirmed Isla was defeated, Takuto yielded himself to the onslaught of information pouring into his brain. The question of “Why” and “Where did I go wrong?” crossed his mind with every new bit of intel and disappeared just as fast without an answer.

Mynoghra’s entire army was in disarray, and the Dark Elves and his direct subordinate units with the ability to contact him were incessantly asking what they should do next. Ignoring all that noise, Takuto blocked out the world and placed himself in a thought bubble that offered some sense of calm.

...A normal person might have shriveled up and withdrawn from the world in his position. They might’ve escaped reality by shutting everyone out and huddling in a corner, hugging their knees. Some might’ve hidden their blunder by throwing a fit and yelling at everyone around them. But the man known as Takuto Ira didn’t fit those personality types.

Eternal Nations’ best player had mental fortitude on an entirely different level from the average person.

Takuto quietly closed his eyes and took deep, measured breaths. It only took a couple of seconds to clear his mind. The act was as normal and deliberate as an athlete taking in the morning sun before a routine jog. The only difference was...when Takuto reopened his eyes, he was greeted by a light that disgusted him in a way it hadn’t before.

“What happened, King Takuto?!”

A distraught telepathic message came from Atou as soon as he’d finished his little calming exercise, as if she’d timed it with that knowledge. Takuto had been so focused on Isla and the twins until now that he’d failed to answer her earlier queries, but he calmly switched over to their telepathic link and spoke with her.

"Isla has been defeated. It seems she was dragged into a forced death event."

"How can that happen?!" He heard her click her tongue, stifling a swear as she raised her voice in frustration. *"It's like what happened to me, isn't it?!"*

Atou's mind immediately went to the damage she'd suffered at General Ice Rock's hands. And then it dawned upon her that in the adrenaline rush and confusion she'd felt after that battle, she'd failed to inform her king about the strange phenomenon she'd experienced.

Atou screamed at the top of her lungs, her beautiful face distorting with anger and outrage. But this was not the time for her to report her blunder and receive punishment. The most important thing for her to do right now was to ensure Takuto's safety.

"Isla's defeat is an emergency. I'll immediately change course back to the capital. Please surround yourself with a guard detail and evacuate your current location!"

Isla's destruction meant almost no military forces were left to protect Mynoghra's Imperial Capital. Of course, there were Dark Elf Warriors on guard duty, and some of *Eternal Nations'* units, such as the Brain Eaters, were around. While they should be enough to handle low-level monsters, they would be out of their league if another one of the Demon Lord's Four Generals showed up. The situation was a thousand times worse than she'd imagined.

Atou spun on her heel and changed directions to race back to the Accursed Lands, feeling a sense of impending doom and annoyance unlike anything she'd felt before.

"About that...I need you to stay the course."

It was none other than her king that caused Atou to stop dead in her tracks.

"Why would you ask that of me, my king?!"

A cloud of dust kicked up around her when she skidded to a halt and looked up at the sky while asking him about his intentions. Her expression had already surpassed a look of mere irritation and anger and was crumpling with her desire to cry. But it was the following words from her king that dried her tears and caused an even harsher look to cross her face.

“Isla is dead. That is the unfortunate truth. But the twins are still alive. They’re currently heading south, trampling their enemies along the way. They’re likely going to avenge Isla.”

“Those girls are?! What in the world has gotten into them?! They can’t do anything—”

“Isla used Demise of the Crown on them.”

With that, Atou understood everything Takuto was trying to tell her.

Demise of the Crown, one of Isla’s subskills, grants the Hero trait to a selected unit. Not only does it grant that Distinct Trait, but it also passes down a percentage of Isla’s stats at the time of her demise. In other words, the twins now had abilities and strength on par with a Hero unit.

It was still unclear what had happened right before and after Isla was defeated. But at the very end of her life, she’d succeeded in passing her power on to her daughters, bringing about the birth of a new Hero. Takuto...was planning on *obtaining* that Hero.

In *Eternal Nations*, units with the Hero trait are too important and irreplaceable to lose. They can’t be reproduced immediately after they get destroyed like regular units.

Now that it’d been revealed that there was a threat to Mynoghra in this world that they couldn’t ignore, mitigating the loss of any additional forces was of the highest priority.

“We can’t lose either of them now. The existence of Hero units will greatly affect the future of our empire... And most of all, those girls are our citizens.”

Atou understood the logic and reasoning behind what he was saying. She could even...understand the sentiment. But only if it were applied during peaceful times. It was not the right decision to make when the state of things was still up in the air.

“Then please call them back at once!” Atou demanded, momentarily forgetting she wasn’t just talking to a friend but also her king and Commander. *“I propose we regroup at the capital and reorganize our forces before launching a counterattack!”*

“We can’t do that. I can see what the girls are doing, but they aren’t taking orders.”

“What nonsense is that?! We don’t need units that can’t take orders! I suggest their immediate disposal!”

“Request denied.”

“KING TAKUTO!!!”

They were in a crisis. Their situation was the worst of the worst. Atou’s impatience rapidly ballooned, and the worst-case scenarios kept flashing in her mind. She didn’t know what had led to Takuto’s decision. To her, it only looked like he was being reckless. At the same time, she was tormented by the thought that her own blunder made things so much worse. No matter how confused and deflated she felt after that battle, she still should’ve informed him of the dangers of attacks influenced by different game mechanics.

Information is the most valuable resource during war. Without information, it’s the same as going into battle wearing a blindfold, and the damage caused by making a wrong decision based on a lack of intel is extraordinary.

Atou clenched her teeth so hard she could feel them cracking under the pressure...and then she shouted, *“Great and mighty King Takuto! I have something I must report to you! The RPG’s mechanics are a real threat! It even bested me, your Atou, and took Isla from us! This failure is a direct result of our incompetence as your Heroes! The responsibility falls on our shortcomings! So please—please—reconsider your decision!”* she implored, her face twisting as it might if she’d been forced to swallow bitter, bitter medicine.

She was basically demeaning herself to get her point across. How much resolve did it take for this Hero, who had absolute confidence in her strength and always took pride in being Takuto Ira’s sword and shield, to deny the very things she prided herself on? Blood dripped from where she bit her lip too hard, proving just how much determination it took for Atou to tell him these things.

But telling him was a double-edged sword.

It might only serve to confuse her king further. Atou might suffer the most unbearable misery yet if it caused him to be disappointed in her. However, that

was a cheap price to pay if sacrificing her pride could alleviate his feelings of frustration and guilt and, in turn, help him make a more rational decision.

Everything was for her king, Takuto Ira.

She laid her heart bare for that reason, but...

"I see... Even so, please go to them. Isla left them in our care."

Takuto's stance was unchanged.

"I can't expose Mynoghra—expose YOU—to danger over mere sentiment! Your Majesty—King Takuto, you are everything to me!"

The plea wrenched from her very soul wasn't reaching him.

Atou expected the worst was yet to come, in the form of some unknown game mechanic leading to the twins' demise and then her own.

She didn't care if she died. It was no skin off her nose. But to Atou, Takuto's death was the most unbearable thing in the world. The fear of that potentially happening because of her tormented Atou more than anything else. That's why, when she received his next orders...Atou felt like she'd been struck by lightning.

"Atou, this is an order. You're the only one I can rely on."

"...sst!!"

Atou felt the air suck through her teeth in a gasp as her impassioned heart was doused with ice-cold water. It wasn't disappointment or despair that cooled her down, but something akin to a fanatic experiencing an epiphany. She had been given an order; as such, there was only one thing for her to do.

At long last, the bitterness twisting her features gave way to understanding and resignation, and then...

"I will do as you command, my king."

...she accepted her king's decision.

"Thanks, Atou. I believe in you."

Atou's change of heart came from her suddenly remembering some very important things, such as just what kind of Commander her king was, how she'd always believed and obeyed his orders to a T, how Takuto Ira was the greatest

player in *Eternal Nations*' history, and how she was the only one...in a state of irrational disarray.

And more than anything else, she remembered the unique talent her master possessed and that she should always believe in...

Takuto Ira always pulls off the impossible in the eleventh hour.

That's how it always was.

Whenever things got dicey, he'd give commands as if he were possessed by the God of Strategy and turn the tables to such a degree that none of his mistakes mattered, making him come out on top. That's just the kind of man *Eternal Nations*' strongest player was. And that was the man Atou trusted and loved with all her heart.

Atou's feet finally moved to take her south. She'd already received all the information she needed to know. Apparently, he already had a firm grasp of the terrain through his shared connection with the twins, and Atou wasn't sure if it was because her connection with him had grown stronger or not, but she could vaguely see what he did.

From the looks of it, they were already fighting at an outpost set up in front of where the Demon Lord's Army had settled. They hadn't yet confirmed their enemy's strength or the twins' new strength. There was a good chance Atou wouldn't make it in time. But she was convinced she'd be able to rendezvous with the girls if she headed there at full speed.

Takuto Ira had given her the order to go, after all. There could be only one result then.

Atou charged through the wastelands. A crater formed each time her foot hit the ground, her inhuman legs propelling her forward faster than a horse.

The strategy was already decided, and she had accepted it. All that was left was for her to accomplish her mission, whatever it took.

Unshakeable determination gleamed in Atou's eyes, and her evil presence grew even stronger. Meanwhile, the enemy monsters that sporadically attacked were scattered like dust before her. She had her king's full support, which meant that there was no one in the world capable of stopping her forward

march.

Except...

“Atou, there’s something I have to tell you first.”

“...What is it, my king?”

Takuto’s quiet voice reached Atou as she bounded down her pathless path. With her mind already made up to follow through with his strategy, Atou concentrated on his telepathic message to ensure she didn’t miss a single word.

“Be extremely careful...”

A dubious look crossed her face then transformed into something more sinister.

“They’re in berserker mode.”

The situation was far more chaotic than she’d expected.





Witch

Unit Type

Idoragya's Seven Apocalypse-Bringing Evil **Witches**:

Sludge **Witch** Atou

Slurping **Witch** Erakino

Witches of Regret, the Elfuur Sisters

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Description

Witches are special units. Only 7 can exist in the world at the same time and they all start with powerful skills and combat strength.

In addition, **Witch** units often have the ability to debuff enemy units, and the presence of a large army or another **Witch** or Saint is essential for their defeat.

They cannot be respawned, so carefully managing them is key to winning the game.

The currently known **Witches** are listed above.

Chapter 11: Witches of Regret

IN the wastelands to the far south of the Accursed Lands, a lone girl appeared before the main defense outpost controlled by Lady Wind of the Demon Lord's Four Generals.

Half of the girl's small body was covered in burn-like, puckered scars, and she wore an outfit that seemed purposely designed to show off those startling wounds. If that wasn't striking enough, a magic circle loomed in one of her eyes, visible even with her head turned down. More than anything else, the dense, unconcealed presence of darkness exuding from her screamed that she was no ordinary girl.

Although the area was illuminated by moonlight, the hour was already past midnight. General Lady Wind gawked for a moment when this girl, who clearly shouldn't be there, just seemed to appear in her territory like a ghost, but she immediately switched gears to defend her position.

Adorned in a light-green dancer's outfit, the pale-skinned Tempest General Lady Wind was the only female general with the Demon Lord's Army. She naturally possessed a level of intelligence that set her apart from the rest of the demons, so she promptly gave orders to the more intelligent monsters under her command and had the girl surrounded in no time.

The girl's name was Caria Elfuur.

"My oh my, what a naughty little girl you are! Are you here knowing this is the Demon Lord's turf, protected by Tempest General Lady Wind? *Hmm?*"

The girl didn't respond. She seemed to be muttering something under her breath, but Lady Wind was too far away to make it out. Skeptical as she was, Lady Wind sauntered right over to Caria until she stood before her.

Lady Wind's monsters with excellent night vision were already in battle position, and not even the tiniest mouse could find an opening to escape from

the circle they'd formed around the girl. They had only summoned the best of the best monsters to advance their goal of world conquest. Her superiority complex gave her such confidence that every organism outside her people was lesser than a gnat, it left no room for her to feel wary or alarmed by potential threats.

"*Haahh*," she sighed. "What woodwork did you come crawling out of, hmm? Are you from that village? My, my, what a courageous little mouse you are, coming here all on your lonesome."

"Why do Cary and Big Sista have to go through these things? Why do bad things always happen? Why is the world so very painful? Why?"

Instead of an answer, Caria merely muttered words filled with bitter regret and hatred.

Lady Wind didn't know what had transpired in the child's life, but she could easily guess that she was lamenting that their actions had made her into a victim of one sort or another.

"What are you mumbling about, hmm? Were you brought here against your will? My, my! You poor, poor thing! I feel so sorry for you, I'll put you through some extra *special* torture before I end your pitiful life!"

Did Lady Wind's words spark a reaction in her? Or was it just because her voice was too loud? Caria slowly raised her head and closely scrutinized Lady Wind's face as if she'd only just now noticed she was standing in the middle of the Demon Lord's Army.

"You...have a very animated face," Caria finally said. "The face of somebody who's overly confident in themselves. The face of somebody who doesn't doubt themselves for one second. The face of somebody who prides themselves on being superior to everybody else."

Lady Wind finally realized a little too late that she couldn't hold a conversation with the girl...and that nothing but madness gleamed from the eye where the distorted letters of a magic circle glowed. In that moment, she also realized she was standing across from a foe who required the highest level of wariness.

“...Keep your guard up,” Lady Wind ordered her troops. “There’s something rabid about this little mouse.”

Lady Wind snapped her whip and prepared for battle; her monsters roared around her.

She’d indeed underestimated her opponent, thinking she was just one little girl, but even if the girl was more than what she appeared, there was still only one of her. What could she possibly do, surrounded by an army of monsters?

Creeped out for inexplicable reasons, Lady Wind scowled.

“It throbs...” the girl kept talking to herself. “My scars...my past self who innocently believed everything would work out...are screaming.”

The one thing that had changed was that now the girl was slowly moving toward Lady Wind.

“You’re one noisy little mouse, aren’t you?!” Lady Wind shouted despite herself, disturbed by the girl’s utter lack of fear and apprehension. “How about I sew that trap of yours shut for good, hmm? Get her!”

The monsters charged Caria at Lady Wind’s command. She didn’t do the deed herself because the wariness she never knew she had was on high alert. Her opponent was too much of an enigma. This was also her survival technique as the physically weakest of the Four Generals.

As many monsters as the system allowed joined in the rush, burying that little body under them. The sound of dull strikes and chewing echoed from the fray...convincing Lady Wind she had won.

“Ahhh, Mama. I’m so sorry, Mommy. It’s all because Cary was powerless...because Cary became hopeful again...”

But...Lady Wind could still hear the girl’s crazed ramblings.

“Wh-What the demi-hell...?”

A shocked voice slipped from Lady Wind when she saw the girl.

The girl’s body was undeniably...injured from the monsters’ attacks. Bright red blood spilled from the injuries caused by the claws, fangs, spears, and clubs used to try and kill her. But it was the very monsters that had attacked her who

started to rot away on the spot. Everything from Orcs to Goblins to Hill Giants and even the demons who stood at the top of the monster hierarchy suffered the same fate...

Black boils oozing blood and pus covered them from head to toe as if an indiscriminately contagious plague had infected them. By the time the putrid smell of their rotting bodies and their agonized screams reached Lady Wind, her pitiful subordinates had collapsed into a heap of gold coins.

“I knew... I knew that I’d only be met with hurt if I relied on the world...on others. I knew I shouldn’t get my hopes up. The world hates Cary. The world absolutely despises Cary...”

The girl continued talking as if she were confessing her sins. Nothing reflected in her glassy eyes, and she seemed to be directing her conversation toward herself and someone who wasn’t present.

Before she knew it...the girl’s wounds had all sealed.

What’s going on?! Lady Wind thought. All my monsters were killed?! Blast it all! How’d she do it? Poison magic? No...I’ve never heard of such powerful and effective magic before! And...how is she healing herself?!

Lady Wind instinctively put distance between them and tried to gather more information. She didn’t understand what she was seeing, except for the fact that it was a fatal counterattack.

Less than a second... It took less than a second for Lady Wind’s pride and joy—her army—to be felled like dust before the wind. The girl’s strength was unfathomable.

“You... Why’ve you been staring at Cary?”

Lady Wind realized the girl’s gaze had landed on her. Caria’s blazing eye gave even the demon general the chills and made her feel eerily like she was looking at hell-incarnate wearing human skin.

Lady Wind didn’t answer her and instead brandished her weapon. Just as she was about to whip the demented girl—

“Swell up like the rest of them...”

“Ah! Huh?”

Her vision warped.

“GYAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAGH! MY FAAAAAAAAAAACE!!! MY BEAUTIFUL FACE!!!”

Lady Wind shrieked. She knew without looking. She knew her face was swelling up like a blighted balloon. Knew that the face she secretly took pride in was being defiled to look the same as the girl’s did.

An invisible attack with no build-up or signs of being activated struck her out of the blue.

“You little shit! Blow her away: Cursed Black Winds!!”

Lady Wind wasn’t so foolish as to let herself go down like this. With one hand covering her inflamed face, she unleashed her Ultimate Attack. This was the ace up her sleeve and the deadly skill only she could use.

Cursed Black Winds is a powerful and merciless Damage over Time spell that she’d created by weaving together dark magic and curses to half all her opponent’s stats during battle. Since it affects all stats, it has the unfair propensity to reduce her opponent’s strength exponentially, and because her game system programmed it to be so, it’s an inimitable skill that can’t be escaped or dodged once used.

But this Ultimate Attack comes with one downside. The existence of this downside was why she’d always accepted her position as the weakest of the Demon Lord’s Four Generals.

That downside was none other than—

〈 ! 〉**The Light of Divine Protection envelops the Hero.**

Caria nullifies the curse!

“...Huh? Is this some kinda bad joke or what?”

—that it doesn’t work on the awakened Hero.

The truth that became apparent at the same time as Lady Wind’s hysteric

shout was the greatest and only drawback to her spell.

Brave Questers' Hero receives a unique blessing after a certain event in the game. That divine blessing negates any curses cast upon him and nullifies all negative status effects that will prevent him from using his full strength. It's one thing for his party members to fall victim to such a spell, but the Hero should never have all his stats halved for the duration of a boss battle.

The Hero is an absolute being in their world, after all.

I'm screwed! I'm screwed! I'm so totally screwed!

When Lady Wind looked around them, she saw a healthy army of monsters fall to the plague. The higher level the monster, the slower the infection spread, but their fate was the same. And so was the inevitable fact that she would soon follow them if she couldn't come up with a solution. Fast.

It's at this late juncture that Lady Wind finally realized the eerie feeling she had was a warning bell sounded by her instincts. She didn't have any memories from multiple game playthroughs. Thus, this was her first time experiencing her Ultimate Attack getting nullified. Her only knowledge of the Hero was vague hearsay, but even then, there shouldn't have been anything linking him to the girl before her.

Besides, as someone who'd always reigned as an absolute force of nature, she'd never experienced being on the side of the hunted...until now.

What the gale is going on?! What hell did this abomination crawl out of?! No one told me anything! No one told me that such a MONSTER exists!

That's why the whole situation shook her to the core. By all rights, Lady Wind, a proud member of the Demon Lord's Four Generals, should have been a symbol of fear.

"AaaaaaaaAAAAAAAAAAAAAAHHHHH!!!"

〈 ! 〉**Lady Wind has fled.**

Together with a hysterical scream, she used wind magic and flew away like a

mighty gale. The move she made was the most foolish and unsalvageable.

Did she not know the way it worked? Did she not know that all Boss Monsters, including the Demon Lord's Four Generals, were locked out of fleeing once they'd initiated battle? Perhaps she didn't know such a mechanic existed because she'd never fled before now. Or perhaps she was so scared she chose to flee despite knowing it was hopeless?

Either way, the game system is merciless. It runs the world according to prescribed rules.

< ! >Boss Monsters can't flee.

No one can flee from the Hero.

No one can flee from a Witch.

Lady Wind failed to escape!

Lady Wind's body was fixed in place as if an invisible rope had wrapped around her and pulled her crashing back down to earth. Stunned by the impact of hitting the ground, she lifted her face with a moan, and her eyes met with the girl staring at her with one blazing eye.

Tempest General Lady Wind...saw memories of things she'd never experienced herself as she was filled with despair before this being that couldn't be categorized under Light or Dark.

"Agh! W-Wait... GAK! Koff, urk..."

Her body oozed puss from its inflamed boils as she rotted away.

The girl quietly stared at Lady Wind—so quietly, with an eye that reminded her of the pits of hell.

"H-Help me..."

Before long, Lady Wind begged quietly for her life before being reduced to a gold coin.

—The moon illuminated the scene with its beautiful, silver light.



NOT far from the hellish scene where the forces of darkness were reduced to nothingness by rot and festering boils, a different kind of hell was unfolding. An enormous magic circle was in the process of being set up at this other outpost belonging to the Demon Lord's Army. The circle pulsed with a reddish-black light and seemed to be powered by the huge crystal-shaped items arranged at set intervals around it.

The magic circle appeared to be the size of a city square. The equipment and spell-type were clearly not of this world, but it also didn't seem like it was meant to bring about the thick stench of death hovering in the air around it.

Only elite monsters were assigned to it. The area teemed with even more powerful demons and monsters than the last outpost, giving away at a glance that this was a critical facility to the Demon Lord's Army.

The scene there was even more bizarre than the outpost wiped out by the plague.

"....."

"....."

"....."

"....."

"....."

"....."

Silence reigned.

Every monster and demon stood in complete silence, staring into space with no life to be found in their glassy eyes.

"Ahahahahahaha! AHA! AHA! AaaHAHAHAHA!!!"

A lone girl frolicked around between the monsters, spinning and twirling about like she was playing in the rain.

This Dark Elf girl with a mesmerizing magic circle brightly glowing in one eye was Maria Elfuur. Madness gleamed in her eyes as she cackled and danced

away, making it hard to believe she was once a child known for her unreadable expression.

In this place where silence and stillness reigned, the girl stood out like a torch lit in the black of night, but the monsters made no move despite seeing her. She spun and twirled to the rhythm of her laughter, enjoying every moment of her little dance.

One person kept their sights set on her. Old Mechanic, the general who handled the construction of facilities for the Demon Lord's Army and fought with a variety of lethal mechanical weapons at his disposal, glared at the girl with hatred burning in his eyes.

< ! >Old Mechanic has forgotten how to attack!

He didn't even know what hit him.

Construction of the magic circle had been going well. The facility had reached 90 percent completion, and it was already at the point where it could be used once they started it up. Satisfied with their progress, Old Mechanic was about to give the order to activate it to his subordinate, Stone Knight, when...all the monsters who'd been diligently going about their work suddenly stopped moving and started staring off into space as if they'd forgotten what they were supposed to do.

"The world hates us! It hates us to death!"

The girl appeared after that.

Old Mechanic could tell she wasn't an ally. He also comprehended that she was an enemy he needed to eliminate. No rules of war applied to the Demon Lord's Army—they could kill their enemies however they liked without reproach.

The problem was...they couldn't remember *HOW* to kill.

Probability of this being some kind of attack...high, he thought. Defense necessary. But the attack type is...unknown!

Naturally, as one of the Demon Lord's Four Generals, Old Mechanic had resistance to a variety of mental status effects. He had complete resistance against simple spells, such as Sleep and Confusion, and even the more advanced spells like Dazzle and Enrage. However, whatever was inflicting him now didn't fall under any of those spells.

He didn't know what spell or attack his enemy was using, but he couldn't just keep standing around in a stupor. Because if he did...

"The world hates us, so we need love!"

The girl opened her mouth wide, snapped it shut, and started chewing. A fraction of a second later, the top half of the monster nearest to her was bit off by the void. The monsters disappeared one by one into the girl's stomach as if they were food offered on a plate for her to eat.

"We're alive. Eat, eat, eat—we survive by eating our loved ones!"

The monsters rapidly disappeared into her belly.

Old Mechanic tried to think of a way to stop her, but he came up empty, as if the very knowledge he needed had been plucked from his mind. He couldn't flee. And there wasn't enough time for him to get...help. He couldn't rely on the monsters and demons serving him. He had to do something about this himself.

But...he'd already lost the ability to do so.

"Can you hear it?! Everybody's whispering to me. Every bite of meat! Every drop of blood! They're whispering to me to live! Everybody's inside me! Mama and Mommy are inside me! I'm not lonely anymore! I'm not scared anymore!"

CHOMP. With another big bite, yet another demon disappeared into the void.

"Thanks a bunch, guys! Thanks a bunch, Mama! I'm happy! I'm oh so very happy!"

CHOMP. Like a child who only bites off the gingerbread man's head, the monsters lost only their heads to the void.

"Everything's so shiny! Love exists because the world's so darn cruel!"

All emotions are born the moment a person acknowledges their existence. Emotions have no shape, they are merely a concept intelligent beings use to

define their reaction to internal or external stimuli.

So, what was the meaning behind the contradiction that led to this girl casting Forgetfulness on everyone while she preached about the existence of love? Old Mechanic no longer had the ability to think about such things as his cognitive functions were in a state of rapid decline. All ability to think was escaping him like air let out of a balloon.

But what if he didn't have to think to eradicate his enemies? What if he just so happened to possess the ability to do just that?

Emergency situation: confirmed. Engaging priority measures. Switching Mechanical Armor to Automatic Attack.

Change appeared in Old Mechanic with a small click.

Earth General Old Mechanic looked like someone had combined a tiny old man's body with steam-powered machine parts. The steel armor that served as his exoskeleton of sorts had a built-in component that used Magic Power and could be set to auto-attack enemies. Old Mechanic's Ultimate Attack consisted of him leaving the fighting to his Mechanical Armor while he buffed and healed himself.

Even if he was rendered incapable of moving, his Mechanical Armor should be capable of eradicating the girl with its overwhelming strength. Switching settings didn't count as an attack. Without knowing what would happen next, the Mechanical Armor's giant arm attacked the girl with a jarring motorized sound.

"That's a no-no."

< ! >Mechanical Armor has forgotten how to operate.

But Old Mechanic's expectations were shattered just like his armor, which fell apart and vanished as if it had forgotten how to exist. It's only now that Old Mechanic realized the child's invisible attacks worked against inorganic objects just as well as they did on the organic.

Threat level: Max. Life forfeiture allowed to stop threat here. Please forgive me, Demon Lord. EXPLODE: MAGIC CIRCLE!

“An even bigger no-no.”

〈 ! 〉Magic Circle has forgotten how to operate.

The magic circle forgot how to operate while it was in the middle of letting its Magic Power run amok to cause a massive explosion. Its operation ended without explanation or any build-up.

Every single strategy Old Mechanic came up with using his limited thought process was nullified with a single word from the girl. It was such an utterly pathetic and quick end.

The magic circle’s purpose was a mystery. The girl didn’t know when she showed up, and Old Mechanic had already forgotten about it. But thinking about it wouldn’t change anything. After all, the magic circle had already forgotten what it was meant to do and ceased functioning.

Old Mechanic made eye contact with the girl.

“Do you...believe in love?” she asked. “Love exists, y’know?”

〈 ! 〉Old Mechanic has forgotten Attack.

〈 ! 〉Old Mechanic has forgotten Agility.

〈 ! 〉Old Mechanic has forgotten Courage.

Out of nowhere, a tremendous sense of emptiness filled Old Mechanic. He was losing his mind in a way that felt like it was being slowly devoured. He’d long since forgotten how to fight and even how to flee. Now he could only display the emotions he was left with.

“E-Eeek...!”

Here was a man who was said to be as robotic and unfeeling as the many mechanical weapons he created...and the first emotion he ever showed was fear. A pathetic voice squeezed passed his lips. His knees clattered against each other as they shook. No one would look upon him now and think that he was once the sinister Earth General who'd terrified the world and brought an end to a great many people and their kingdoms.

The girl's eyes twinkled as she ate up his reaction.

"Is it scary? Are you scared? Hey, aren't you scared?! *Ahaha!* See, you are scared! Sooooooooooooooooooooo SCARED!!"

The girl frolicked up to him, grabbed his head in both hands, and stared into his eyes. It was as if she was drinking in every ounce of the fear he felt, making her scarier than anything else. Old Mechanic was finally reduced to abandoning all his pride to scream like a baby.

"U-UWAAAAAAAAAAAAAH!! Demon Lord! Please save me, Demon Lord!"

Correction, he'd already lost his pride to the void.

"Don't worry. You can just forget if you're scared."

〈 ! 〉**Old Mechanic has forgotten Fear.**

〈 ! 〉**Old Mechanic has forgotten the Demon Lord.**

〈 ! 〉**Old Mechanic has forgotten who he is.**

Old Mechanic convulsed once before standing there in a stupor. His eyes had glassed over, mirroring what remained of his subordinates. He looked like a man who'd completely forgotten who and what he was.

The girl—Maria—stared at him with a deranged form of compassion.

"Forget. Forget everything. The good, the bad, the world, everything... I'll erase it all for you."

"Ah, um... What? Huh?"

"All that will be left is love."

Old Mechanic had already been stripped of everything. If the mind makes the man, then he'd even lost his mind. All that was left was an empty shell of a man. And yet, his heart was filled with a mysterious warmth. Perhaps that was the feeling given by this so-called love he was left with.

Unfortunately, without ever learning if that was true, Earth General Old Mechanic even forgot that he was alive.

—The moon illuminated the scene with its beautiful, silver light.

Eterpedia



Caria Elfuur

Combat Unit

Strength: 22 Move: 2

<<PREDATION>> <<PLAGUED>>

<<EVIL>> <<HERO UNIT (FAKE)>>

<<THE HERO (FAKE)>> <<FANATIC>>

※ The higher the moon is, the greater her Madness and Strength grows. Her Strength reaches its zenith on the day of the full moon.



Eterpedia



Maria Elfuur

Combat Unit



Strength: 25 Move: 2

<<PREDATION>> <<ADDLED>>

<<EVIL>> <<HERO UNIT (FAKE)>>

<<THE HERO (FAKE)>> <<FANATIC>>

※ The higher the moon is, the greater her Madness and Strength grows.

Her Strength reaches its zenith on the day of the full moon.

Description

~We hate the world since the world first hated us.~

Chapter 12: Curtainfall

A man wearing a worn-out black frock coat stood in the middle of the vast, empty land and assessed the two girls before him with a hawkish gaze. They were the poor souls who'd been at the mercy of this cruel world and their even crueller fate and found themselves possessed by the moon's magic.

The land where they stood was strange, to say the least. Something had clearly been under construction there at some point, given the various spots with scaffolding and the lumps of clay and lumber brought from elsewhere and placed in strategic locations around the area. The strangeness came from the lack of even a skeleton of a building, leaving only the eerie feeling of emptiness in its place, as if they had given up before they'd even started.

The scene graphically portrayed the fact the man was the last one standing.

"It's you, then?" he asked quietly. "You're the ones who defeated my army? Fate seems to get a kick out of messing with me to allow you to do so with such finesse."

The man sounded amused. Though his deep, baritone voice and word choice made him sound introspective, it was filled with a certain kind of mirth, like he was enjoying this conversation and didn't feel an ounce of wariness or alarm.

"However...that means I must end you here. That's the way this works, after all."

Brave Questers' last boss is...the Demon Lord.

This man was the final destination on the Elfuur Sisters' regret trip.

"I don't know how you felled my army. But insignificant small fry can't even land a scratch on my body."

The world warped with his words. The Magic Power in the air fluctuated rapidly and surrounded his body. It then became a jet-black garment, creating the ultimate defense.

< ! >The Demon Lord puts up a Dark Barrier!

The girls could no longer see the man's face, proving the existence of an inviolable force field that was strong enough to distort light and space.

However...

< ! >The Hero's power disperses the darkness!

The Dark Barrier has been dispelled!

A flash of light came from the Elfuur Sisters, followed by a high-pitched cracking sound that resulted in the barrier surrounding the Demon Lord to shatter like glass. Surprise clouded the face that had been obscured by the darkness a moment before.

"That ability... Does this mean you have awakened the Hero's power? How is that possible? The Hero isn't supposed to exist in this world... That's the way this was supposed to work, so what in the accursed void is going on?"

The Demon Lord looked baffled for the first time. Only the Hero could use this ability—that was true in every single memory he possessed, and the same person always filled the Hero's shoes, no matter the playthrough.

The Dark Barrier was his Ultimate Defense skill that protected against every kind of attack. It was because of this very power of his that he was able to terrorize his last world and it became known throughout the land that only the Hero could defeat the Demon Lord. That premise...that absolutely immutable law crumbled before his eyes.

For the first time in his life, the Demon Lord experienced the emotion known as confusion.

"Who gave you that power? What granted you the Hero's power?"

The girls didn't answer. They merely walked closer in silence.

Did they not know the language? Or were they simply not interested in conversing with him?

The Demon Lord chuckled to himself as he remembered the true Hero was also a silent man.

“It’s of little consequence either way. I must destroy everything and conquer the world. That’s the way this works.”

And so, the Demon Lord changed mindsets: from conversation mode to battle mode, from a scruffy-looking man to the Demon Lord.

...It’s not just his mindset that changed either.

The Demon Lord’s frock coat ripped as his body swelled and countless blades grew out of him like a coat of porcupine spines. He grew in size until he was bigger than a small manor.

“...You think it strange for me to transform from the outset? Would you prefer this to go through boss battle stages like in the game? No one would ask for such constraints in this world that’s been freed from so many of the restrictions we’ve come to know.”

The man’s same low, baritone voice boomed from the giant body with blazing, blood-red eyes.

The Demon Lord’s body embodied every battle in this world, and that’s not just a metaphor. His new form was comprised of innumerable moving corpses with swords, axes, spears, shields, chainmail, and numerous other battle equipment linked together to form its armor.

The Demon Lord’s true form was a four-legged beast whose very existence symbolized discord and conflict.

A giant eyeball rolled in its socket to focus on the Elfuur Sisters. The coat of blades adorning the beast’s back clanged together in a chorus that almost sounded alive.

As someone who’d finished verifying which restrictions had carried over to this world from *Brave Questers*, the Demon Lord decided to use his full strength to eliminate the two girls. His supernatural senses as the Demon Lord and the

warning bells set off by his racing heart led him to that immediate decision.

In other words, every part of his being told him he mustn't underestimate these girls. That they were a terrifying anomaly in this strange new world...

"It's likely that...defeating you is a trial I have been tasked with completing."

There was no point in conversing with them. Conversations are established when more than one person participates, and that was nigh impossible with these girls who only answered him with bloodlust. Although he understood that, the Demon Lord still had something he HAD to ask them.

The lonely Demon Lord asked them one final question, as if that question were necessary to start the battle.

"There is something I wish to...confirm with you before we fight."

After the entire army of monsters had been slaughtered, forgotten they were even alive, or were devoured, their lord, the last one standing, asked his foes about the one thing that mattered most to him.

"Do you believe there is a god?"

"No such thing exists," both girls spat with the hatred that had driven them this far.

< ! >The Demon Lord appeared!

And so commenced a battle meant to pay tribute to all those who'd died, to all the memories that were long gone, and to the past they could never return to.



BATTLE ignited between both sides. In a single moment, Maria and Caria doled out coordinated, invisible attacks unique to them, and the Demon Lord eclipsed all of these attacks with sheer strength.

"Blades! Offer up a life to me!"

Hundreds of the countless weapons that composed the Demon Lord's true

form shot off his back into the sky, took a radial orbit, and rained down on the Elfuur Sisters. This attack that could be described as a rain of death looked like a death sentence from the target's point of view. More than a hundred blades were raining down from the sky with perfect accuracy.

But the attack's target was no ordinary opponent either. Far from it. They might've only just come into this role, but they were still...*Witches*. Together the twins counted as one of Idoragya's Seven Apocalypse-Bringing Evil Witches. They weren't benevolent enough to be wiped out by such an attack.

"Ahahahaha! So perty!"

Maria lifted both hands toward the sky, her eyes sparkling with childish delight. The second the magic circle blazing in her eye flashed, the sharp weapons cascading toward the girls all forgot their objective.

"Caria!!"

"...I've got it, Big Sista."

Caria's magic circle flashed next, causing the ground under the Demon Lord's feet to give away and unbalance his large body.

"Impudent brats!" he cursed them.

They didn't directly attack the Demon Lord because of his level and high Defense. The twins' Addled and Plagued skills were powerful, but they could be resisted by opponents with much higher stats. They could instantly kill low-level mobs, but they needed time to take on more powerful enemies.

Attack range limitations and the Demon Lord's regeneration abilities made things even more difficult. The Demon Lord had been sticking to attacking them at a distance ever since he'd used Analyze to assess their abilities at the start of the battle. To make matters worse, his powerful regeneration abilities healed any damage he'd received and dispelled Forget whenever it did get applied.

On the other hand, all the Demon Lord's attacks kept forgetting their objective due to Maria's Addled, so the battle was essentially at a stalemate.

For that very reason, Maria chose now to unbalance the Demon Lord and momentarily distract him. They put this plan into action to make close-combat a

possibility...by obtaining a physical weapon.

< ! >The Elfuur Sisters have obtained the Demon Lord's weapon.

...The Demon Lord's weapon is cursed!

The girls were quick to scoop up their pick of the countless weapons that'd been launched at them and now littered the battlefield. Maria went with dual blades and Caria chose the halberd.

Of course...

< ! >Maria uses Addled!

The Demon Lord's weapon has forgotten its curse!

...the curse wasn't even worth worrying about.

"You dare to wield a piece of *my* body?! What arrogance! What insolence! And that's what makes you perfect fodder for my trial!"

The ground exploded as the girls charged forward. The volley of weapons launched to intercept them instantly vanished, and boils erupted all over the Demon Lord's body to hinder his movement.

And still, the Demon Lord did not succumb.

Blade and claw that could easily tear through steel clashed at speeds beyond what the human eye could follow. The Demon Lord couldn't run away. Even if he weren't restricted by the system, he still wouldn't have that option. The battle was slowly but surely leaning in the Elfuur Sisters' favor.

The Demon Lord had entered his final boss form from the start. He no longer had any aces up his sleeve to bring the battle back in his favor. Not only were his debuffs being nullified, but he also couldn't even land one of his normal physical attacks on them. Meanwhile, the close-combat attacks his opponents doled out were definitely bringing him closer to his demise.

Game Over—those two painful words and the inevitable, eternal erasure from existence that they promised plagued his thoughts already.

“I can’t lose! God is on my side! There’s no way I’ll lose in a place like this after God chose me!” the Demon Lord howled.

His cry was a plea to the “god” who’d given him knowledge and led him to this world. How ironic it is for a being who’s supposed to bring darkness to the world to believe in God.

“Peace! The peace I desire more than anything is just within reach! I will overcome this trial given by my god!”

Is it not even more comedic for all these evil-doers to seek their own peace across the board?

This goes for Flame General Flamin, who’d gone out with a bang alongside Isla, and the Demon Lord as well. Why were they brought to this world? Why were they given sentience?

How much happier would they have been if they could have just continued to live on as game data without being given a soul?

The Demon Lord was reminded of what had transpired when he came to this world. He’d been greeted by an endless expanse of white nothingness and an overwhelming presence that told him just how tiny and worthless his existence was. Then came the truth of the world.

Yes, *God* exists.

It appeared before them and undeniably made a deal with them. It was because of that promise—that deal they made with God—that the Demon Lord didn’t question this land or his quest to conquer the world. He only became all the more determined to do so after learning he was an existence that couldn’t do anything else.

Everything he did was for the eternal peace and happiness brought about by God. All of it was so he could ascend from a game character to a being with an immutable soul.

“AaaaHAHAHAHA!” Maria laughed. “C’mon! C’mon! C’mon! Are you silly?

God doesn't exist. There isn't a god ANYWHERE! The world is cruel like that!"

"You keep blathering on and on about god-this and god-that. Shut your yapping trap before I make you," Caria said coldly.

Both girls were utterly uninterested in his unobtainable dream.

"God... God does exist! It's God who grants peace! Only God understands our suffering! That's the deal! That's how it's supposed to work! My existence here is proof of that!" the Demon Lord roared.

Everything that'd happened at that time, from God's compassion to the Demon Lord's confession, wish, and declaration before him, swirled through the Demon Lord's head.

He was but one scruffy man, and his ambitions were about to crumble away like sand spilling through his fingers. And at the hands of just two girls! His wish was going to be extinguished before two measly little girls!

"I *will* obtain freedom. I will obtain freedom and go to a world without conflict! I'll go outside these confines! Go outside the game!" the Demon Lord thundered. "The great god will grant my wish if I just believe!"

The girls who'd clearly heard him merely looked at the Demon Lord like they were looking at the filth that had gotten on their clean, white shoes.

The twins knew better. They knew this world was devoid of hopes and dreams. Everything was deserving of hatred, and the more you believed, the greater the betrayal you'd taste.

The only thing worth believing in was the past. The only thing they could believe in was the kind souls who were lost to the world because of their kindness. Their minds, bodies, powers, wills, convictions, thoughts—everything that they were, was dedicated to the past.

Filled with regret for those who'd died, the girls who went mad with the power of the moon pushed on solely for the people they had lost.

"It's the world! God will grant any wish if you offer up the world! What's your god? What do you believe in?! Tell me the name of your god!"

"God doesn't exist," the girls repeated in unison.

God doesn't exist. Such a convenient being doesn't exist in any corner of this wicked world.

Their king's kind smile briefly came to mind, but they shook it off. They both felt their hearts squeeze.

—The moon illuminated the scene with its beautiful, silver light.



THE battle came to a predictable end. The Demon Lord's abilities came up short against the Elfuur Sisters, who were strengthened by the maximum buffs granted to them by the full moon. The difference in strength was too great to be upended by a random miracle. Things might have gone differently if there wasn't such a huge power gap between them. But reality is cruel like that.

A video game can be considered like a world of its own. It entertains many people, tells a lengthy story, and puts people through emotional rollercoasters.

Considered a classic masterpiece in the role-playing game genre, *Brave Questers* has a deep-rooted fanbase and has spawned countless saves, fan theories, remakes, and every kind of spin-off into other media formats. As the last boss who faces off with the player at the end of every *Brave Questers*, the Demon Lord's end was too quick and lonely.

"Ahh, I'm going to die in obscurity. My dreams...my hopes...are going to fade away."

Even after losing all his weapons and being downed, the Demon Lord still held on to life. The twins seemed to have already lost all interest in him as they stared absently up at the moon.

The battle was over.

They didn't have any compassion for the loser.

But even if the battle was over for the Elfuur Sisters, the same couldn't be said of the Demon Lord.

"I mustn't... I can't die. As long as I still have the will to go on, I swear to God... I will not die!"

Sometimes a strong enough will can change fate. Sometimes it's even

possible to forcefully overcome the impossible. Even more so when that impossible fate is defined as a game *event*. The game system doesn't care about the "characters" after all.

< ! >A strong will supports the Demon Lord.

The Demon Lord's injuries rapidly recover!

Awakening to a new power in a moment of crisis—is perhaps one of the most cliched and conventional tropes built into so many games stories that many have grown irritated with it. But it's because it's so very cliched and common that it shows up so often.

The world is cruel and yet cruelly fair.

If two powerless, pitiful girls can obtain a new power amid their regret and hatred, then it should be equally possible for a powerful creature of darkness to obtain new power amid hope and longing.

"Oh! *Ooooh!* I knew it! I knew it! I'm not meant to be ended here! God loves me!"

A new magical power wrapped around the Demon Lord's body and emitted a bright light. It was a strong and refined light. Eyes blazing with an unshakeable will burrowed into the girls when they finally deigned to look his way.

"See! God has been watching over me! God will bring me victory!"

And then the Demon Lord raised his resonant voice to utter the name of the god he put all his hopes and dreams in...

"Hear me! My god's name is—"

< ! >God's name mustn't be uttered without permission.

"...Wha?"

Someone came flying down from the sky. It wasn't the Elfuur Sisters or the Demon Lord but a third party who wasn't welcome there. The click of metal like a sword being unsheathed could be heard in the distance.

Silver light ran in a straight line, followed by a thunderous roar. A vertical line formed in the Demon Lord's body quicker than the dirt kicked up into the air.

With the superior senses and abilities they'd inherited from Isla, the Elfuur Sisters jumped away just before the attack landed and turned their sharp gazes toward the Demon Lord as they regained their balance.

“.....”

There they found their former enemy cut perfectly in two. The cut was a thing of wonder. He was beautifully sliced in half with such a perfect line, you'd think the attack was made with a ruler. The attacker seemed to have applied just the right amount of strength to rip through the Demon Lord's thicker than steel body without doing much damage to the area around him. This was only further proven by the fact the giant body formed from iron and corpses was still standing.

But the change became more apparent with the passage of time. Before long, the Demon Lord's halved body slowly fell to the ground and turned into an unbelievably large mountain of gold coins.

< ! >The Demon Lord has been defeated!

Brave Questers' Demon Lord's Army has been destroyed!

The girls exchanged brief looks before returning their gaze to the interloper.

Something had interfered and stolen their kill. That reprehensible interloper had swooped in with what seemed like very intentional timing to slay the Demon Lord.

Who did it? For what purpose? And how? Various questions flashed through their minds but vanished without an answer.

This was an unexpected turn of events, but it didn't distract the twins from

what was important. Their instincts as the HERO, a Hero unit, and as Witches told them to be on high alert against the being that easily put down the Demon Lord before they could.

“...Who might you be?” Maria asked.

“...Why did you interfere with us?” Caria asked.

A man appeared once the dust settled. He didn't look *that*...old. He actually seemed way too young. Probably only four or five years older than the twins. He was a young man with a curved, single-edged weapon that glowed beautifully in the moonlit night, wearing an unfamiliar black outfit unlike anything the girls had ever seen before.

This frivolous-looking man shook the blood off his weapon with one swing and then returned it to its scabbard. The girls were watching him. Confusion and wariness flickered in their gaze, but it was outweighed by the hatred burning there.

The Demon Lord was...*their* enemy. They were planning on annihilating every last enemy—directly or indirectly—responsible for the death of their second mother. As civilians who were suddenly thrust into this nightmare, the girls didn't know much about the Demon Lord's Army or *Brave Questers*.

But the superior senses they'd inherited with Isla's Hero trait and the abilities of the HERO they had awoken to during Flamin's event accurately showed them the truth behind the tragedy. That was why they were convinced the Demon Lord was the cause of it all, and they'd wielded their strength to avenge Isla by winning the battle against him.

The girls were no longer helpless—they had power now. Their power had the potential to destroy the world without anyone being able to stop them. They were hoping that if they defeated their mother's enemy with that power, the deep sea of emptiness they felt inside might fade a little.

The cruel, cruel world wouldn't even give them that much? Their anger boiled over, and that emotion, coupled with a thick dark aura, distorted the space around them like a shimmer of hot air.

Who were they up against?

Their alarm seemed unnecessary when the man reacted to their death glare with a look of shock. Then he uncomfortably scratched his cheek, a reaction that felt a little too lighthearted for the moment...

“Huh... Did I do something wrong?” he asked innocently.

Chapter 13: The Setting of the Moon

If a critic had been present for this scene, they would've surely labeled it third-rate. That was just how abrupt, nonsensical, and bizarre the young man's forced entry upon the stage was.

"What are you?" Caria quietly asked, sounding like she was suppressing her anger.

One look at her was enough to see that she was dying to tear him to shreds. She didn't do that because he was more or less responsible for defeating the Demon Lord with one hit—though the girls did weaken him beforehand.

He'd split the Demon Lord in two with a single stroke, much the same as if he were crushing any small fry you might find along the wayside. His skill was impressive, to say the least, but not one that should've been used on the Demon Lord. As such, it was hard to get a feel for who—or what—they were dealing with. So the girls decided to ask for his identity to feel him out first.

"Uh...I'm just a guy who thought he'd rescue some girls from a big bad monster?" the man answered with zero wariness. It was as if he were just greeting a neighbor he'd bumped into in the park during the early afternoon.

They were currently standing in the wastelands to the far south of the last known civilization on the continent. There was no good reason for this man to be there or his carefree attitude.

The Elfuur Sisters shared a look. What remained of their rational sides within the madness was wise enough to question whether this newcomer was friend or foe. But even on the off chance that he was an ally, he'd just insulted them in the worst possible way by stealing their kill at the last second.

"Rescue *us*? Did we look like we needed rescuing to you? You oughta get your eyes checked," Caria said with venom.

"Ahahah," Maria laughed. "That's funny. We didn't ask for help. What made you think we needed to be rescued?"

Their instincts as Witches told them to be wary of his actions. His behavior was strange enough to make them address it.

“Maybe...”

They weren’t going to leave it be.

“You interfered for a reason?”

The man fell silent at their accusation.

Maria’s eyes opened as wide as possible to skewer him with a mad look designed to peel his hide. The man shrunk back, startled by the madness burning within the Elfuur Sisters that he hadn’t noticed sooner. He was unquestionably hiding something from them, and the Witches weren’t going to let his clumsy reaction slide.

“A-Ahaha! Don’t be silly. You’re putting me on the spot here! It was a coincidence! I swear! Believe me! C’mon, turn that pretty little frown upside down— B-Bad time for a joke?”

The girls silently brandished their weapons. These were the weapons they’d taken from the Demon Lord, that had forgotten they were supposed to disappear after their master died. The halberd and dual swords that embodied all the wars and evil deeds of another world dully reflected the moonlight as they eagerly waited to sink into their next prey.

“Wh-Whoa! W-Wait, wait! I wasn’t trying to do anything funny! I really was trying to help you!”

The man thrust both hands in front of him as he frantically tried to persuade the twins to calm down. But there wasn’t a soul alive in this world capable of stopping the girls in their berserker mode. The only people capable of such a feat...had passed on.

Did the man sense the strange aura they gave off, or did he act on instinct alone? Determining it was impossible to persuade them, he shrugged his shoulders, his carefree expression vanishing as he silently rested a hand on the sword at his waist.

“Don’t try it. You can’t beat me at your current level.”

He was about to unsheathe his sword in response to their bloodlust, but there was something oddly theatrical about his comment. It was almost as if he were acting according to a script. He almost seemed like he was being forced to play a different role now. The sudden shift in his behavior gave that disturbing impression.

...So what?

The girls felt like spitting on the warnings their instincts were giving them. They couldn't care less about any of that. They didn't give a damn about it. The only thing that mattered was that this man had defiled their past. He had ruined their atonement and offering to the past. They'd been rudely robbed of the ability to dedicate this battle to their mother because of this man's interference, leaving them eternally unable to avenge her with the Demon Lord's death.

How humiliating! How enraging!

Their hatred had grown so large that even the sisters couldn't keep up with it as it turned into dense darkness that poured out of them.

Stillness came to the world. It was the calm before the storm.

They were already standing close enough to hear each other. All they needed was one little thing to trigger the next battle.

The man bent his knees in preparation to intercept their attack.

The twins bent their knees to lunge at him.

And just like that, before either had the chance to learn about the other, they launched into an unproductive deathmatch—

"That's far enough."

"...?!"

Today seemed to be a day of interferences and strange events.

A quiet voice forced the battle that should've begun to stop and be rewound.

There was a moment of confusion over what had happened. It took only a second for the girls to realize their feet had been frozen by a block of ice.

“Amazing. It’s even capable of forcibly inserting a stop to an already started action...? Did time just get warped too?”

It was no ordinary ice. There was no way ordinary ice could stop the girls who’d inherited Isla’s Hero unit status and the Hero’s powers. It didn’t just stop them but reversed them out of an attack they were already in the process of unleashing. That could only be the work of some strange mechanic.

Quickly coming to that conclusion, the girls looked toward the speaker. There they found...the Hero called Sludge Atou.

The ability to completely undo an action that has already been taken...

The skill Atou had used was Glacial Decapitation—the Ultimate Attack she’d snatched from Frost General Ice Rock. At the time she’d confronted it herself, she’d thought it was a skill that landed a hit no matter what, but it appeared that it was actually a skill with the ability to put a halt to the target’s turn and give the user that turn instead.

...It was a thousand times worse than an attack that always hits.

As she pondered just how unfair an RPG’s forced attacks and events could be, Atou instantly linked with Takuto to send him a telepathic report about what she found as she wordlessly walked closer to the girls.

“Wow! Another pretty girl?!” the man cried with glee when he saw Atou.

“.....”

Atou glanced at him. Shock flashed across her face, followed by a bitter look. Given how many times she nodded to herself, it appeared like she was receiving instructions from Takuto. Unlike the twins, she and Takuto seemed to know something about the interloper.

“So? Who are you? Why are you here?” she asked him.

“Uh, yeah...about that... It’s, uh, classified? Oh, I guess you wouldn’t know what classified secrets are, would you? Haha...”

I know what classified secrets are, at least, Atou thought, but ignored the man to telepathically consult with Takuto instead. She kept her gaze firmly on the man, never letting her guard down for a moment.

“Yes, I understand, Ta—my king.”

It only took a few seconds for Atou to receive her instructions. Then she gave the man one hard look before averting her gaze. While the man was still fussing over the situation, she addressed the sisters.

“I’ve already heard about everything from His Majesty. He has ordered you both back to base. You’ve...already accomplished your objective, no? Then it’s time to go home.”

An odd third party was hanging around, but Atou’s orders were to retrieve the twins. Safely returning the sisters to Mynoghra’s Imperial Capital was her duty. Fortunately, it looked like their objective—the Demon Lord—had been defeated, so she thought there shouldn’t be any issues getting them home.

Except...

“That man got in our way.”

“We can’t let him get away.”

The Elfuur Sisters still had unfinished business. They fervently sought an outlet to take out their regret and hatred.

“*Huh?* Our king ordered you home. Why aren’t you obeying? Are you girls...*misunderstanding* something here?”

Atou let her annoyance show through her words. To her, Takuto came above all else. And she also believed that the Dark Elves should feel the same as his citizens. Mangy Dark Fae, who happened to be in the right place at the right time to receive the honor of becoming the king’s citizens due to his boundless mercy, had no right to disobey his orders.

“Don’t get in our way,” Caria demanded.

“We won’t forgive even you, Miss Atou, if you do,” Maria threatened.

“Did you go mad with your first taste of power? You urchins need to be put in your place.”

It sounded like something had snapped. A legion of tentacles burst from Atou’s back. Each swaying tentacle had a clear objective and gave off a bloodthirsty aura that warned they were ready to strike anyone who dared

disobey Takuto's orders, be they friend or foe.

Atou's current Strength was unclear. But Sludge Atou's true worth went beyond simple combat strength—it lay within the limitless number of abilities she could snatch from her enemies. And she had just succeeded in obtaining all the skills she could want from her battles with the Demon Lord's Army.

The twins' combined abilities were certainly one of the most annoying types to go up against, and their Strength was not to be underestimated either. But they posed little threat to Atou.

All she had to do was subject them to an inescapable preemptive strike by inhibiting their ability to act with Glacial Decapitation and then attack at a distance with her tentacles. She might be up against two little girls, but they had inherited the Hero trait—they shouldn't die from it.

It'll be excellent if they're immobilized by the damage. Even better if they faint. If they can't recover from this...then it's a necessary loss.

A natural-born Hero unit can calmly assess the situation and swiftly develop a plan of attack. Even with the twins' new powers, it was nigh impossible for them to win against the overwhelming battle senses honed by one of Mynoghra's most elite units.

Neither side could back down. The twins were fighting for their past and the Hero for her king. Explosive tension flowed between the three girls who completely ignored the man, who kept reaching out his hand and pulling it back as if he were debating if he should mediate for them.

And then it happened...

—The moon's beautiful, silver light...was *obstructed*.

It was nothing out of the ordinary—dawn had come.

Before they knew it, the moon had already begun to sink below the horizon, losing its luminance. At the same time, the sun poked its head out, outshining the moon from the opposite direction.

"...Caria, let's stop now."

"Big Sista..."

“...?”

It was the older sister, Maria, who'd muttered those words as she watched the setting of the moon. Apparently, the younger sister shared the older's opinion, as they both stared at the moon like the fight had gone out of them. Eventually, they sadly looked away from the moon and bowed deeply in Atou's direction.

“...I'm sorry, Miss Atou.”

“I'm veryest sorry for being rude.”

The two apologizing girls were acting just like their old selves. From that, Atou determined they could be persuaded to return home without incident. She glanced at the setting moon, nodded as if she understood what had happened, and let her expression soften ever so slightly now that the girls she'd once taken a liking to had returned to themselves.

“...I see. Well, the situation being what it was, I'm willing to overlook your rudeness as long as you obey orders. However, be sure to apologize to His Majesty.”

“*Mm-hm*, I'll say sorry.”

“Yessum.”

The girls tottered over to Atou. Seeing as they were nodding a bunch of times to themselves, they must've immediately started telepathically apologizing to the king.

He seems awfully Japanese to me, Atou thought as she turned her attention to the most dangerous person there.

“...And? Do you plan on just standing around all day?” she asked him.

She assessed the frivolous-looking young man, who appeared to be around sixteen to eighteen years old. It was her first time seeing clothing and a weapon that looked like his, but she knew what they were. She had already confirmed her suspicions with Takuto through their shared vision, but they both hoped they were wrong, because if they were right...things would turn bad fast.

Atou quietly waited for the man's next move with more tension than she'd

felt dealing with the twins.

“Nah. Not really, *hahaha*. It seemed like a pretty serious conversation, and I didn’t want to come across as not being able to read the room by butting in.”

The man didn’t belong there from the beginning until the end. He didn’t need to take their kill or butt in while Atou was trying to persuade the twins. Only he had this extremely out-of-place feel to him, as if he were a forced story element being crammed into an already written script.

How to handle him? Atou pondered. *King Takuto strictly ordered me to avoid fighting him.*

As it stood, they no longer had a reason to fight now that the twins were behaving. Atou had been given the gist of what had happened from the king, who’d been watching events unfold through his shared vision with the twins, and from that, it seemed like the man really was trying to help out the sisters in his own way by defeating the Demon Lord.

But Atou was against conversing any further with this man who was practically the poster child for all things shady.

Did her feelings show? Or did the man finally reach his limit for how much awkwardness he could handle in one sitting? Whatever it was, he lifted one hand in the air and rattled off his goodbyes.

“Okay, that’s it for me today! I mean, *uh*...you all seem fine, so I’ll take my leave before I get in the way!”

And then he turned on his heel to leave. He looked back once over his shoulder, to which Atou responded with a slight nod.

Carelessly interacting with him here would be like playing with fire. They had no idea what would happen if he turned out to be exactly the kind of person Atou and Takuto suspected he was.

“Sorry for sticking my nose in where it’s not wanted! See ya girls later!”

Then the man dashed off like a rabbit and eventually disappeared beyond the horizon at a terrifying speed. Atou exhaled a small sigh after she saw him go.

This was for the best.

Takuto was ordering her to hurry home too. Any further trouble would be beyond Mynoghra's processing capacity, and they wanted some time to reorganize their forces before tackling yet another problem. That's why, while the man's motives piqued their curiosity...he was best left alone for now.

Why were Atou and Takuto so wary of him? The man they let leave had one very distinguishing feature. The clothing he wore looked just like the school uniforms from Takuto's old world, and the weapon he used was known as a katana. Both of those were items not from this world.

Something extremely troubling was happening.

Atou and Takuto had ranted about how difficult and terrible their starter location was when they first arrived in this world, but that seemed like it might only be the beginning of their woes. Atou's sigh grew heavier with that thought.

In any case, nothing can be settled until we get home.

Atou turned back to the behaving twins and addressed them like normal.

"All right...let's go home. Things are going to get busy for us. You will both have to start helping out too."

Atou realized the twins had moved away from her. They were standing in front of the mountain of gold coins formed from the Demon Lord's corpse.

"...Is something wrong?" she asked.

"Um, what is...this?" Caria asked with more reserve than usual, probably because she felt bad about inconveniencing Atou earlier.

"Gold coins from *Brave Questers*. The monsters from that land turn into gold coins equivalent to their value when they die," Atou explained as she looked up at the mountain of gold coins. "That amount skyrockets when it comes to the Demon Lord, I see."

The amount was exasperating. Not to mention there was gold strewn all over the path she'd taken from the monsters she'd slain along the way. By this point, the surrounding area probably had enough gold deposits to put the gold rush to shame. Of course, the economy would obviously collapse if they took it to market, so they couldn't use it will-nilly. Leaving it there would only create

problems once someone else found it, too.

“Will Mama Isla...revive?”

That quiet question came as Atou was wondering what to do with the gold. She contemplated the question as she dug through her knowledge to see if there was a way to revive Isla.

“Unfortunately, Isla is dead,” she softly replied.

“Hic...sniffle...aah...hiccup...!”

“Waaa...uwaaaaaaa!”

Tears formed in the girls’ eyes. Maria stifled her sobs as she stayed standing, while Caria collapsed to her knees. They didn’t think they would be left with such emptiness at the end of their regret trip. They didn’t think their wishes would be so disregarded.

They wept and wept for the past that could never be returned to. The beautifully glittering gold coins almost seemed like some kind of reward...and that only made it all the sadder.

“Uwaaaaaaaaa! Aaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaa!!”

“Hic...augh! Aaaaaaaa!”

They simply cried their lungs out. That was all they could do. That was the only thing left that they could do.

Atou sent a telepathic message to her king, informing him they would be a little late as she watched them weep.

The moon’s silver light had gone somewhere far away and no longer illuminated the scene.



Demise of the Crown

Skill

When the unit with this skill is destroyed, it can pass on the Distinct Trait <<HERO UNIT (FAKE)>> to one other unit in the same stack.

NO IMAGE

Description

Don't cry, my beloved daughters.

Don't grieve, my precious daughters.

I told you what you need to know. I gave you the skills to survive.

I'm certain you will overcome any obstacles that come your way in the future.

You will be able to steamroll any hardships.

I bestow my crown upon you now.

Go on, it's time to leave the nest, little ones.

Take this power and live strong in this world.

I love you both with all my heart.

Chapter 14: And so Begins the Game of the Gods

<South Idoragya, Uncharted Territory>

A man was on his knees in the middle of the empty wastelands.

“Oh man, that was *scaaaaaaaaaaaryyyyyyyy!!!*” he cried.

His face was taut and twitching, giving away how stressed he felt. Or rather, it was clear he’d just escaped from an incredibly undesirable and uncomfortable situation.

He looked around sixteen to eighteen years old, wore a black Japanese-style high school uniform, and had an ornate katana sheathed at his waist. The young man was clearly not from this world.

He couldn’t stop thinking about the conversation he’d just escaped from and shouted “Seriously, *scaaryyyyyyy!*” at the dusty ground for the second time before finally regaining some semblance of calm and unsteadily pushing himself off the dirt.

Remembering the events that had led to him defeating the Demon Lord and becoming an interloper had him cursing his god for putting him in such an awkward situation.

“What the hell was that whole bit about ‘I want you to go and rescue a sweet and beautiful pair of young ladies whose lives are in danger!’ They weren’t in danger AT ALL! Going only made them angry! Stupid screw-up god!” he vented up at the skies.

The way he stomped his feet as he ranted was quite like a clown putting on a comedy act. But he’d made some remarks that couldn’t be overlooked, and they caused the person who was listening in to widen their eyes with surprise.

Yes, *God* was real.

God was the being who’d sent the man to this world.

God was the being who’d granted him his powers.

God was the being with a specific objective.

God was the being who had introduced himself as a patron.

The mysterious being the young man had met had introduced himself as God and gave him a second chance at life to resolve some sort of screw-up they'd committed.

His memories of his past life ended abruptly when two bright lights came blaring down at him. Before he even had a chance to process that he'd probably died, God told him the facts and granted him a second life and tremendous power as an apology.

Ever since that encounter in that world of endless white, he'd been reluctantly obeying God's orders. Most of God's requests were inconsistent and aimless things like "Defeat some random monsters that appeared in the distance however you like" and "Try running at full speed." It was as if the young man were a new toy a child had gotten their hands on for the first time and wasn't quite sure how to play with it yet.

Of course, he still had free will, so he could've run away whenever he wanted. But he reluctantly played along because he had a certain level of respect for the being who'd given him a second life, and he was genuinely concerned about the lack of civilization in the deserted lands he found himself in. It could also be said that he felt he owed God a debt of gratitude too.

And it's then that God finally gave me my first meaningful-sounding quest, the young man thought.

It was none other than the being who self-identified as God who'd asked him to defeat the Demon Lord. It beseeched him, saying that it was very important he do this, and fast. But look at the mess it got him into when he actually followed through with the request.

Apparently, he was a completely unwanted and unneeded third party to that battle, and the three pretty girls he'd encountered treated him with disdain and looks that could kill. His old self probably would've apologized profusely with a strained smile, his knees knocking together the whole time. In that regard, he felt momentarily grateful to God for strengthening his mental fortitude but quickly shook his head.

I wouldn't have been in that sucky position if that screw-up of a god hadn't given me bad instructions! he lamented. *Everything I did backfired.*

“Welp, I guess I was sorta at fault too. I'd be lying if I said I wasn't hoping for the typical development to unfold when I rescued a cute girl...and that's why I leaped before I looked.”

He was an avid reader and connoisseur of anime, manga, and movies. Of all the media he'd consumed, *isekai* was the most popular genre, which always revolved around being summoned or reincarnated into another world.

Most *isekai* stories follow the same formula: the protagonist gets to live a second life in another world, where they overcome hardship and go on great adventures to rise up and leave their mark on their new world. The protagonist of those stories is almost always accompanied by a harem of beautiful girls and women. Some of the most popular series crossed his mind when he'd received God's request, and he thought he might get to live out his greatest fantasies... but it wasn't to be.

“But it's all that worthless God's fault for putting the idea in my head by saying, ‘The girls you rescue will fall in love with you at first sight and won't be able to keep their pretty hands off you!’ Dang it! He totally had me fooled! In all of my past life, I never once received as wilting of a look as those three girls gave me just now. This seriously sucks!”

At any rate, reality seemed to have been a bit harsh on him. The cute girls he was supposed to rescue didn't need any rescuing and actually looked like they were going to kill him for butting in. The girls of this world seemed to be significantly stronger than in the books he loved. Then again, he still felt like he'd been tricked into earning their ire...

“I'm pissed!” he shouted as he remembered God was the source of his miserable experience. “Heeeey! Crappy God! Get your butt out here! Show yourself and clearly explain things! I can't accept this crappy outcome, you big fat loser!” he shouted some more.

There was no response, as if his words never reached their intended target. This was what happened every single time God didn't want to deal with him. The young man angrily stomped his feet some more as he thought about how

flippant God was.

“Maaaaster!”

It was during his tantrum that someone appeared in the middle of the Uncharted Territory’s otherwise empty wastelands.

“Hm? Oh, it’s you, ■■■.”

“Yes, indeedy! It’s your lovely slave, ■■■.”

This girl was the first person he’d met in this world. She seemed to be a slave girl God had scrounged up from somewhere for him, and she obeyed his every order as if she were a baby chick following its parent around. The young man was plenty dissatisfied with God, but he let a lot of things slide because of this girl. When all was said and done, he was just like any other man: extraordinarily weak when it came to a cute girl who worshipped him.

“Oh yeah, you’ve been hiding all this time, right? You’re not hurt anywhere, are you?”

“I’m just dandy. I was protected by God’s mysterious superpowers!”

“Did that dumb perv say anything? Wait, you weren’t violated, were you?!”

“Um, I do have a message for you. It goes something like ‘My bad, tehe ♪.’”

“Next time I see ’em, they’re done for...”

The girl wryly smiled as she nodded along with the man. Either she sympathized with his anger or was equally fed up with God’s go-as-you-please attitude.

“Well...I am grateful for the cheat powers I got outta this. Ahh, man, guess reality doesn’t play out like a novel, does it?”

“Cheeeeet powerzzz? What’s that, master? Oh no! Look ou—”

There was a quiet *chhk* sound. By the time the girl realized that was the sound of the katana being returned to its sheath, the Hill Giant that had been hungrily looking at them from behind a boulder fell to the ground in two halves.

“Oh, it’s all good. Don’t ya worry. He’s already done for.”

The whole thing happened faster than the eye could see. The threat was

eliminated before the girl could inform her master about the Hill Giant hiding behind the boulder behind him. He'd casually unleashed a slash attack at such a godly speed that it could be considered an Ultimate Attack, a Special Move, or even a Super Move.

"O-Oh my gosh! That was sic, master! You're so amazing!"

"Haha. That was nothing. Overpowered cheat's gonna do what overpowered cheats do."

He bashfully scratched his cheek at her excessive praise. Meanwhile, the girl was so excited by the glimpse she caught of her master's infinite power that she hopped up and down. Watching her absolutely adorable and innocent reaction helped to quell the man's simmering rage until he didn't care anymore. He had a lot of grief he wanted to take out on God, but just being with this girl was enough to appease him.

He wordlessly looked beyond the horizon. There were no signs of life as far as the eye could see in the wastelands, only rocks and boulders. But even if he didn't have anywhere specific to go, he still needed to keep moving. He had no reason to stay put, after all.

"Okay...where to?"

"To the north seems good to me, master?" the slave girl given to him by God suggested with a soft smile.

The young man didn't have any particular direction he felt inclined to go in, and the God who should be giving him instructions seemed to be avoiding any kind of contact with them. Since he didn't care where he went, he decided to go with her suggestion.

"Good idea... Shall we do that, then?"

"Yes! I will go wherever you do, master!"

As long as he moved, he should eventually end up *somewhere*. And even if he didn't, God would contact him when something came up. After all...he and God had a shared goal.

"*Uggh*, next time I see that crappy jokester of a God, I'm gonna put 'em

through a ten-thousand-hour-long lecture... I mean, me? Save the world? Is that even possible?”

“If it’s you, master, then anything’s possible! You’re oh so very strooong, after all!”

The girl didn’t miss a beat when it came to praising him.

He patted her beautiful black hair as he thought her expectations were a little too heavy for him.

“I always thought I wanted to become like an overpowered protagonist from anime and light novels, but actually becoming one is a lot harder than it looks...”

The slave girl merely flashed a carefree grin in response to her master’s comment. There was no doubt in their minds that he would triumph and excel. Although they had no basis for thinking that way, his strength just seemed that infinite...

“But it’s worth giving it a shot, anyway!”

“Absolutely, my master!”

And so the young man went forth. His deal with God was to fill the world with the light of justice. To control all the sky, all the sea, and all the earth, and drive out evil from this world. For that was what the Jokester God wanted from the young man who’d transmigrated to this world.



<El-Nah Alliance of Elementals, Absolute Defense Site Etroqual>

AT the same time the Holy Kingdom of Qualia, an empire blessed by the Holy God Arlos, found itself victimized by the whims of an evil Witch, the likes of which even the Saints struggled to keep at bay...the second biggest holy empire in Idoragya, El-Nah Alliance of Elementals, also found its existence threatened like never before.

“Report! Several unidentified figures were spotted coming from the front!”

“Got it! Elemental Warriors, get in position to intercept an attack in front of Etroqual! Keep your eyes peeled!”

A man who seemed to be the commanding officer gave orders to the warriors based on the runner's report.

They were inside an extensive wooden fortress built within the Elven Forest, where the air was cool and pure, and the atmosphere had a certain kind of sacredness to it. The fortress was as tall as any castle's ramparts, and the number of Elemental Warriors stationed there seemed greater than the number of stars in the sky. The Elven Elemental Seals engraved everywhere shined a faint light to increase the strength of the fortress, and the materialized Greater Elementals patrolled the area like a swarm of sparkling fireflies.

This giant fortress that suddenly appeared in the forest depths was known as the Elves' Absolute Defense Site Etroqual. Every fortress is built with holding off enemies in mind. There was no way they'd constructed something of this scale for the fun of it. Etroqual was currently under enemy attack, as if to prove the point of this fortress' existence.

"The Vixens are here!!" one of the Elven Warriors shouted as he kept close watch over the front of the fortress with his bow drawn.

What had appeared from the woods was a group of beautiful women. Nay, their beauty was far too great to simply describe as beautiful. Their entrancing looks were so out of this world that it enthralled even the Elf men, who were surrounded by beautiful women daily. Something about the scent coming from their deliciously curvaceous bodies beguiled and tantalized the men despite knowing they were lusting after the enemy.

But the Elemental Warriors knew these sultry vixens were scarier than any monster. They had very distinct features that separated them from Humanoids: goat horns, bat wings, and serpentine tails unlike any that existed in this world.

They were a creature known as Succubus.

"One, two, three... *Ah-aaah...*≡!" the devilish woman leading the pack let out a pleased moan. "Whatever is a girl to do with sooooo many virile gentlemen?! I can't stop *drooling...*≡!"

Just hearing her utter those words caused the young Elves, who'd sortied from the fortress to intercept the vixens, to blush and grab their swelling nether regions.

A Greater Succubus can seduce a man with just the sound of her titillating voice.

That legend, which had been disregarded as nonsense, showed what it was really capable of the moment it became a reality.

“Still, this is the first time I’ve been welcomed by soooo many cuties ≡! Just how many dicks are there? It’s turning me on just thinking about it ≡!”

The woman at the front stood out the most. She wore clothes that accentuated her curves and placed her hands in positions that invited naughty thoughts. She clearly didn’t doubt her attractiveness for a second. She also wore distinctly different accessories from the others, which made her outfit even fancier.

From all appearances, she was the group’s leader.

“Queen, it’s not very classy to count the number of men by their dicks.”

“Queen, pleeeeeeease wipe up your drool before it dirties my shoes... *Hngh.*”

A tall and short woman stepped forward on either side of the woman who was lusting after the Elf Warriors. They both appeared to be Succubus too.

The leader let out a sexy laugh in response to their nagging and flashed a sensual smile that would down any man.

She was the Queen Succubus, Vagia. This woman, known as the strongest of all the Succubus, was the root cause of the great cataclysm afflicting El-Nah and the subject of a strict order from the Tetrarchy Council to keep her contained at Etroqual.



“You vile Succubus skank! Cease your sleazy games at once!” angrily bellowed Zais Tethroy, the commander of Etroqual and a promising candidate to become a future clan chief.

The Elves were in a more precarious situation than any of them ever imagined possible. They had spent too long trying to ascertain the status of their fellow clansmen that they’d failed to prevent the Succubus invasion from encroaching further into their territory. The Tetrarchy Council continued to reject any attempt to request aid from the Holy Kingdom of Qualia out of misplaced pride and consideration for their ally’s equally precarious circumstances.

They had lost a great many clansmen as a result. Nay, their clansmen had been charmed to the other side. That terribly crude reality that seemed to exist solely to drag the proud and holy Elves through the mud infuriated Zais.

But no matter how angry the proud and noble Elves may be, their enemy certainly wasn’t on the same wavelength.

“How could you call this a game, honeybun≡? We’re just enjoying every minute of what it means to be alive≡!”

Queen Vagia struck a pose with a triumphant grin as if she were proud of her comeback. As she did, her outer garment exploded with a magical popping sound, revealing her voluptuous mounds. She was stripping...for no reason at all.

“Queen, you don’t need to strip piece by piece.”

“Queen, your b-boobies are showing! *Hngh...*”

Even Succubus seemed to have their own form of propriety, as the two attendants candidly scolded their queen. But the Succubus in question didn’t listen to a word of it. Succubus were infamous for not listening to what anyone had to say, and Vagia was the queen of that too.

“Shameless trollop! Put some clothes on!”

Naturally, Zais had to make his disapproval known. Sure, he was shocked to see her clothes just pop off like that, but the greater issue was that he didn’t know where to look. Odds were that he wouldn’t be able to concentrate during

the holy war about to take place.

Zais was a man like any other. Because he was a man, he wasn't confident he could keep his thoughts from wandering to more...tempting places. Such was the pathetic nature of the male sex.

"Oh no. You want me to cover up the girls? Could it be my knockers aren't as much of a knock-out as I thought? I'm in shock, boo≡!"

"No, I'm not saying they aren't alluring, but— That's not what matters here!"

"The twins and I are *soooo* relieved to hear that! Would you like to cop a feel? C'mon, just a little poke? They're begging for some attention≡!"

"Silence, you devilish minx! We aren't discussing your bosom right now!"

Zais was baffled by why he had to shout so much just to get his enemy to put some clothes on, but then he came back to his senses. He couldn't let her suck him into her pace. He'd be walking right into the palm of her hand if he continued to converse with her. That's how it happened to all his clansmen, too. Before they knew it, they were so charmed by her that they agreed with everything she said.

Even Zais was starting to find his affections growing for Vagia and her *charming* personality.

"Witch Vagia, Queen of Indecency... I will put a stop to your reign of vulgarity here and now! I, Zais Tethroy, shall save my clansmen from your wicked clutches per the way of the Elemental Laws set forth by the Tetrarchy Council!"

With his words, the Elemental Seals engraved into Etroqual behind him shined all the brighter. All the Elementals in the area gathered within the building like they were returning to their nest, and their brilliant glow eventually turned into a ray of light that shone down on Zais's body.

Words weren't needed between enemies who needed only to destroy each other.

Zais was implying that with his actions.

"You are bearing witness to a large-scale Elemental Rite known throughout the Elf clans. Not even a Witch like you can survive against this power that

gathers all the Elementals and Magic in the area into me!”

“*Tehehe*. It’s definitely given you a *boost*. I see, I see. So, you want to communicate with our bodies≡? I’m totes down for that, sugar cakes≡! Come at me, boy. This Succubus Queen Vagia will thoroughly, enjoyably measure your male prowess!”

Zais wielded his spear. Engraved with Elemental Seals, it received supplementary Magic Power from Etroqual and thrummed with swelling energy. The Elemental Warriors waiting behind Zais also brandished their weapons, and the Archers on top of the ramparts drew their bows.

“Come have your way with me, Elf boys.”

“Mr. Elf...p-please be gentle with me.”

“Ehehehe≡! Come have a good time with this busty lady≡!”

“Elementals! Grant us victory! Let us conquer these women, brave Elemental Warriors!”

“***Ooooooh yeah!!!!***” the Elemental Warriors bellowed in unison.

Zais became a ray of light and unleashed a strike backed by the full might of the Elementals at Vagia. The forest quivered from the shockwaves, sending birds flying from the trees. The overflowing force shook the ground, and the hammer of light undisputedly came down on the Witch. Every Elf felt certain of the future chief’s victory, and even the Succubus stared on in shock.

But only Zais...

“...What the?!”

Only Zais...understood that his mighty thrust was prevented by something soft and jiggly.

“Suck my ultimate Boob Slap!”

“*Hurrrrrgh!!*” Zais cried out as the impact from her Boob Slap sent him tumbling to the ground. His cheek swelled bright red, indicating how much more deadly the attack was than its namesake.

But Zais didn’t give a hoot about that. There was something far more shocking

to him than his aching cheek.

“Wh-What in the Saints just happened?! What did you—”

Zais staggered to his feet with the assistance of the Elf standing where he'd rolled to. Meanwhile, Vagia was still standing as relaxed as ever in front of him, without even a scratch where he'd thrust his full might into her beautiful bosom.

“Did you know: men can't win against boobs... It's a sad, sad fact≡!”

“Stop your mockery! We're talking about the divine protection granted by the Elementals! About the Elemental Rites! A strike that housed the power of every Elemental living in Etroqual! This can't be! You can't be standing there unscathed! You just can't!” Zais fumed with confusion. What he knew to be conventional wisdom was turned on its head just like that.

As he felt his convictions crumbling around him, Zais was dominated by a feeling akin to despair as he racked his brain for how he could possibly kill this Witch now.

Vagia quietly opened her plump lips as she watched him. *“Erotic Succubus Official Correspondence Vol.14.”*

“...Huh? What was that?”

Zais couldn't resist asking her about it. This obviously wasn't the time or place for such dialogue, but she'd brought it up so randomly, it was hard to ignore. He also understood he hadn't a bloody clue what her words meant. What exactly was she trying to tell him?

As the man with enough talent to become a future clan chief was too dumbfounded to do much of anything, Vagia continued to speak.

“‘The Succubus Queen is over level 90. Her attack strength is comparable to the latest aircraft carrier strike group, and not even a tactical nuke can breach her defense...’ That's just an excerpt from page 56≡!”

“*Ehr-kraft? Tak-tuh-kl nook?* What in the Elven Forest is that? What are you blathering about?!”

She'd revealed her combat abilities to be on a ridiculous level for any

individual to possess, but her words were lost on Zais. This was another world. There was no way he could know about the weapons of mass destruction that rampaged in a world that ran on yet another set of rules.

Queen Vagia maintained her relaxed pose with her chest exposed and a smug grin on her pretty face. Her two attendants seemed to take pity on the overwhelmed Elf since they tried to put it into words he could understand.

“We are far more powerful than your wildest dreams, Elf boy.”

“Mr. Elf, our races are on totally different levels, *hngh*.”

Known as Noble Succubus, the two attendants calmly assessed their difference in strength and simply stated the facts. On the ground around them were the Elemental Warriors who’d charged in to attack with Zais. All of them had earned the position of Elemental Warrior through assiduous training and rigorous rituals. El-Nah’s elites, who could fight on par with Qualia’s Paladins, had been bested with ease even when they fought as a group.

This surreal fact drove home the gravity of the situation for Zais more than words could.

“Well, that about sums it up, hon≡! When I first saw this setting, I totes thought that the devs were morons for inserting it into an *eroge*! But porn-logic is surprisingly handy≡!”

Vagia was talking about where she was from and just what kind of being she was, but there wasn’t a single person among the Elves who could possibly understand her. She told them because she knew they wouldn’t understand.

“Especially since we’ve been summoned to such a dangerous world≡!”

Everyone started to laugh without knowing why. The bewitching laughter coming from the Succubi gradually gained momentum and spread through the Elves as it encircled them. Panic spread through the Elves as they sensed this lewd chorus that seduces even the most chaste of men was ringing in their defeat.

But no one, not one, ran away.

After all, they had all already been smitten beyond self-control by this group

of unrealistically beautiful women.

“But that has nothing to do with you boys now. It has nothing to do with us right now either≡!”

Queen Vagia ushered forward the Succubi waiting behind her with a snap of her fingers. They were all smiling the way someone drunk on anticipation might as they eagerly waited for the queen to let the debauchery commence.

The wait was over as the merciless queen declared the start of the feast devoted to every pleasure in the known world.

“Ladies, it’s dinner time! Show these Elves a good time that’d put even the most niche and fetish-filled adult video to shame!”

“Yaaaaaaaaaaaaay!!”

The Elves hastily fled as they regained their self-control. But the Succubus captured one after the other with their extraordinary strength. It goes without saying what’d happened to those who got caught.

The two attending Noble Succubus turned toward Queen Vagia as they watched sexual intercourse take place all over the forest out of the corners of their eyes.

“Queen, what do you plan to do next?”

“Do about what, *mm*?”

“Queen, we’re talking about the enemies from other gamessss... *Ugh*, why’d they all have to come from such serious and violent games? We’re bound to lose since we came from such a silly erotic game.”

“If we lose, then we get to have loser sex as punishment. Doesn’t that sound delicious in its own way≡?”

The petite Noble Succubus turned bright red and started fidgeting until she finally muttered “I could be down for that...” and said no more on the subject. The taller Noble Succubus gave her head a light shake at her partner’s very Succubus-like reaction, sighed, and then looked up at the sky like there was no use fighting it.

Put into the best of moods by their pleasing reactions, Vagia smiled.

“Hatred, killing, war...all of it is uselessly useless≡. It’s useless, meaningless, worthless, and unproductive≡. Sex’s where it’s really at. Sex, I say! Everything can be solved if we forget all our worries and just make sweet, sweet love≡! We came here to make that a reality...”

Even her roaring laughter had enough Magic Power imbued in it to ensnare any man. Every fiber of her being existed to enslave men. Vagia was created for that purpose and lived every moment for it.

Vagia had no objective. She had no dreams or aspirations to work toward. She simply did whatever she and her god felt like doing.

The ultimate desire can be refined into either the greatest of accomplishments or the worst of nightmares. Sometimes it is simply a matter of having the right opportunity and the correct mindset to succeed.

Queen Vagia smiled a smile capable of charming all life to their naughty downfall.

“M’kay, as Chaste Witch Queen Vagia, I suppose I’ll commence conquering the world as my beloved God of Excess desires...≡”

New threats were undeniably pervading the world.



<Holy Kingdom of Qualia’s Northern Province, Site of the Witch Disturbance>

A world completely closed off by snow. The earth was frozen, the town was frozen, and even the people had turned into frozen popsicles.

On this day, the Witch and Saint had their twenty-second encounter in the middle of ground zero of the Northern Witch Disturbance.

“Hiya, hiya. Nice to meet ya, good to see ya. How ya been, Sainty?”

“You always open up with the same line, Erakino.”

“Hmmmmmm? Really? Welp. Not that I’d know that anyway♪!”

How many times had they had this same conversation?

Saint Soalina leveled Erakino with a glowering look, never letting her guard

down for a moment despite her mounting frustration over the Witch's desire to open every encounter like they were meeting for the first time.

"I will uncover your secret this time," Soalina flatly declared as she readied her Holy Staff.

Further discussion was crass—no, it was dangerous.

Saint Soalina had a strong advantage over Witch Erakino.

The primary ability Soalina knew Erakino used was called Slurp, which allowed her to turn people into accommodating dolls. Similar to Zombies, these dolls were stronger than when they were alive and couldn't be stopped unless you bashed in their heads.

Meanwhile, Soalina's ability, Blooming Burials, was an Arte that allowed her to summon large-scale flames to cover an entire area. Wielding this Miracle Arte just once allowed her to return the Horde of Slurped to dust. If you exclude the mental anguish it caused her, Soalina was the best suited of all the Saints to put a stop to this Witch's ability.

This was why Erakino could never defeat Soalina. Because she'd never win, Saint Soalina faced Witch Erakino with the absolute highest degree of vigilance.

Erakino had been killed a total of...*twenty-one* times so far.

"Shucks, we should do somethin' to commemorate our twenty-second battle, Sainty! I'd sure as hell like to beat ya soon!"

Soalina was unquestionably killing Erakino. She'd done everything from incinerating her corpse to applying Holy Seals to it. Why, she'd even gotten into the habit of late of deliberately bringing the corpse back to base with her to dissect it and pickle the chopped-up pieces in vats of holy salt...

And yet, no matter what Soalina did, Erakino always revived and showed herself again with supposedly no memory of what had transpired. Clearly some sort of black magic was at play here, and that fact always kept Soalina on her toes.

And more than any other factor...

"Are you leery because I defeated the last Sainty and her *little dog too??*"

Witch Erakino had gotten the better of the Veiled Saint. Although she'd somehow survived the fight, she was bedridden until further notice. Word had it that another Saint had rushed to heal her, but the power struggle peculiar to Qualia had a way of hampering things, leaving Soalina without solid details.

Soalina didn't know why the Veiled Saint, who should've had the upper hand in the battle against the Witch, had lost. They were always one step behind their enemies—that fact, coupled with the lives lost, slowly gnawed away at Soalina.

But...

"Whatever wicked Artes you use does not change my duty to destroy evil in God's name."

Soalina was a Saint. If there was even one soul left in need of saving, then what was there to hesitate over? If saving that life required her to wade through hell, then so be it. Because she *had to* save lives...

"Now that's dry! You're about as dry and rigid as drywall, Sainty! How 'bout adding a lil' more flexibility into your life? You'll thank me for it later!" Erakino slowly raised her hand as she threw out that casual advice.

The battle was about to begin. A battle that always ended faster than it began.

Erakino always activated something that was nullified by God's Divine Protection, and then Soalina would pierce the Witch's heart with her Holy Staff. The last few battles were essentially played out like fixed matches and always ended the same way.

But things were a little different on this day of the twenty-second match.

"Sorry, but even I'm gonna blow a gasket if I don't win soon... So that's why —"

An uncharacteristically serious look crossed Erakino's face. She seemed determined and a little impatient, hinting that there was more behind her than just clowning around.

Meanwhile, Soalina made a fatal mistake on this day. She had placed too

much confidence in believing that God’s Divine Protection would protect her from *EVERYTHING*. The thing was, it had, in fact, protected her from the invisible malice Erakino unleashed twenty-one times. Each time she was exposed to the Witch’s attack, its power vanished before it could harm Soalina.

That’s probably why...

“—I’m gonna roll the dice again today, ’kay?”

Maybe that was why she missed the signs—the *omen*.

“*Again* with that nonsense? The result won’t change, no matter what evil tricks you try—”

Clatter-clatter-CLANG! Something rang out.

Erakino rolls 1d100=100 for Slurp

Rolled: Critical

“...Ah...”

The twenty-second match ended just like that.

A surprised gasp slipped past Soalina’s lips, and that was it for her.

Before either of them really registered what had happened, the strength went out of the Holy Kingdom of Qualia’s ultimate weapon, and the light of will was extinguished from her eyes, proving that Erakino’s skill had captured her soul.

“U-Uh... Did I just roll a Critical?”

Erakino was stupefied for a long moment after that. Disbelief colored her face as she tottered over to Soalina, who stood there unmoving, and waved her hand in front of the Saint’s vacant eyes. Finally convinced of her win, she trembled as she hung her head...and then...

“BOOOOYAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAH! Your girl Erakino pulled it ooooooofff!!”

...She shouted loud enough for her voice to travel across the frozen land and

thrust her fist into the sky.

“Hot dang, it took twenty-two different character sheets, but I’ve finally made it! After changing my stats and info so many times it made my head hurt, I can finally reign as an overpowered character!”

Erakino skipped and twirled all around Soalina with such excitement, she looked just like a cute little girl and not some nasty creature who’d plunged a great many people into the pits of misery greater than death.

The blizzard intensified, but this one spot seemed as cheery as a spring day due to Witch Erakino and Witch Erakino alone.

“Master! Master! Are you watching, Master?! I did it! Your girl Erakino did it! Praise me! Praise me!”

Something strange started to happen then. Erakino began talking to something. Her gaze went to the sky. Obviously, nothing actually existed where she was looking. It seemed more like she was using some sort of skill to speak with someone somewhere else. She called that someone...Master.

“Yuppity yup yup! Roger dodger! You’ve gotta point there! Maybe we need to verify it? That’s just like you, Master! *Huh?* W-Wait, *whaaaaaaaaaaaaat?*! Hold up, hold up! That’s hecka rude of you to become infatuated with Sainty here when you’ve got such a cutie patootie PC like me!” Erakino carped at the sky.

Her face was flushed red with excitement, and although she was criticizing someone, she couldn’t stop her lips from twitching into a gleeful smile. From all appearances, she was close to whoever it was she was talking to, and that person was evidently of higher status than her. Their conversation seemed to be a discussion about their next strategy, which hinted at the high likelihood of Erakino belonging to some sort of group.

“So? What’s next, Master?”

The discussion continued.

The Witch ignored Saint Soalina, who stood there in vapid silence, as she received orders from some entity. She kept nodding her head in a showy way, like someone taking a conference call, until something in the conversation finally piqued her interest enough to slap her hands together.

“Oooh? That’s right! That’s totally right, Master! We got a quest from God! Aye, aye, sir! Aye, Aye...my *Game Master*~♪!”

And then Erakino swept into a girly curtsy directed toward the being she trusted more than anything else in the universe.

“Hehehe~♪! Mynoghra...eh? Now we’re talking!”

When Erakino raised her bowed head, her expression shifted from girly to that of a Witch. She had received her next orders. She was off to a good start with this character build, and lady luck seemed to be on her side this time around. That’s why she had to choose her path now, or else this would be it for her.

“Let’s do this, me! It’s time to step up my *game*! Lil’ Erakino here is gonna charge forward however the die roll and the Dice God directs *moi*!”

Erakino spread her arms out and jumped for the fun of it. As if responding to her resolve, everyone who’d been Slurped and lost their minds crept out of the shadows in droves and followed behind her and Saint Soalina like a merry parade of zombies.

Witch Erakino had a dream. A dream she wanted to come true so badly she was willing to sacrifice anything to get it. She wasn’t going to lose until she had her way.

“It’s world conquest time, Slurpies! Yippee ki-yaaaaaaaay!!”

Erakino set course toward the south for the person she called Master, for the deal she’d struck with the Dice God, and to conquer the world...



<Mynoghra, Treehouses>

AROUND the time *Brave Questers’* Demon Lord was defeated, and that series of chaotic events had come to a close, Takuto exhaled a sigh of relief that the worst possible situation hadn’t come about. He’d been using his authority as an *Eternal Nations’* Commander to watch the entire exchange between Atou and the Elfuur Sisters.

“Haaaa... It’s finally over, huh?”

His long-suffering sigh seemed to last a whole minute.

Takuto was currently somewhere a little unusual for him. He'd been watching and giving orders from an uninhabited residential corner of the city. This spot allowed him to hide apart from the citizens, so he'd be better suited to respond to an enemy invasion.

"I'm beat..."

He heaved another weary sigh. He'd already ordered Atou to return home. As long as they didn't run into any trouble along the way, she should be back soon with the Elfuur Sisters. Elder Moltar and the rest of the troops dispatched to Dragontan had also changed course to return to where Takuto was waiting.

He had a bazillion things to think about and do, but he had a little time to himself right now.

What's the most effective way to use this time? Takuto raised his head, which ached with mental exhaustion, and suddenly realized there were several guards around him. They were a division of the Warriors. They were sticking close at hand to protect their king and even lay down their lives if it meant Takuto's survival.

"Leave me," Takuto quietly ordered the men who were still on edge.

"Yes, sire! But how can we do that..."

The Warriors on guard duty grew uneasy. The king's orders were absolute, but they were justified in floundering over whether they should obey a request when they were unsure the danger was really gone. Naturally, Takuto understood that much. He nevertheless gave the same order again.

"Leave me."

"P-Pardon us!"

The Warriors hastily retired from the treehouse.

Maybe Takuto was just feeling overly self-conscious for letting them see him in this pathetic state. He felt guilty for ordering them in a stronger tone than intended. After confirming the guards had scuttled far enough away, the blood draining from their faces at his harsh tone, Takuto flopped down on the floor

with his arms and legs spread out.

“How lame was that...”

I’m about as lame as they come. Haa. This is what I get for underestimating my enemy and overestimating myself! My own miscalculations led to this miserable situation, and here I am, making another stupid mistake by sending my guards away.

What am I gonna do if there’s an enemy out there with the ability to hide within my territory without me being able to detect them with my Commander skills? What kind of national leader isolates themselves from their people during a crisis? Are you even considering the drop in morale you’re causing your troops and people?

Takuto felt like the rational side of himself was blaming him for his poor decision-making, which only served to plunge him deeper into the black pits of depression.

Just how dependent are you going to be? Huh?

Feelings of remorse bubbled up within him like a can of soda that had been shaken too hard. He felt the optimistic dream he’d harbored when he first came to this world, his dream of creating an empire where everyone could live out each day in blissful peace, crumbling around him like a castle of sand being swept away by the waves.

“Isla...”

Her name slipped sadly from his lips.

I wanted to talk with you more. I didn’t know you as well as Atou, but we still spent so much time together playing Eternal Nations. I really wanted to get to know you for real in this world. I just never got around to it...

What did she think of me? Now I’ll never get the chance to ask her.

Takuto wondered if anything could be done for her as he reeled from the shock of her absence leaving him more hurt than the damage to his forces had.

Resummoning a Hero unit was *virtually* impossible. It wasn’t entirely impossible, but the available option was more of a remedial measure than

anything else. Several conditions needed to be met to resummon a defeated Hero, and those conditions couldn't be met as long as Atou and the other unsummoned Hero units were still a part of the empire.

In other words...Takuto would never be able to meet the entity known as Isla, Queen of Bugs again using *Eternal Nations'* built-in mechanics.

“...Maria...Caria...”

He had forever stripped the twins of their second mother through his actions. That fact became a heavy shackle that weighed Takuto down. He knew all too well how much the Elfuur Sisters adored Isla. He also knew painfully well how they'd lost their first mother and their hearts in the process.

The conversation he had with them that day when they told him with sorrowful eyes that they should have died instead of their mother repeated endlessly in his head and imposed a stamp of incompetence on him for betraying their trust in him.

That which has been lost will never come back no matter how hard you fight for it.

The entity known as Takuto Ira was the undeniable loser at this moment.

“DAMN IT ALL!”

Whether it was out of anger at himself or to distract from his misery, Takuto jumped up like he couldn't take his emotions a moment longer and slammed his fist into the floor. He'd hoped feeling physical pain would take away from his emotional anguish. He'd always hated pain, but he wanted to punish himself right now.

Unfortunately...

“What the?”

A crisp cracking sound echoed loudly through the room. The fist he'd expected to hit something hard sank through the floor. At first, he wondered “Did the floor melt?” but quickly realized that was wrong. The treehouse's floor, constructed with recently cut lumber, had cracked open where Takuto punched it.

“Whoa! Stop!”

Takuto shouted with surprise at the destroyed floorboard, but his shock didn't end there. Apparently, his single punch had unluckily cracked through one of the support pillars under the floor, and the building started to collapse in a chain of collapses marked by the sound of shattering and exploding wood fragments.

“Oh my god! Whoa! Waaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaah!”

The Dark Elves built their dwellings high in the trees. What naturally came after their collapse was a thrill ride straight down to the hard ground. Each treehouse was built about one hundred feet up in the trees. The human body isn't built strong enough to survive that kind of impact.

Takuto felt his body float in the air for a second before his view flipped backward. He prepared himself to die for a second time as he squeezed his eyes shut, and a dull impact struck him all over.

“Ow, ow, ow... Wait, what?”

When he opened his eyes again, the scenery wasn't much different from before.

“Huh, it doesn't hurt.”

He poked his head out of the pile of wood used to build the collapsed treehouse and restlessly looked around him. When he craned his neck back, he saw the treehouses built by the Dark Elves looming above.

...The oddest thing was, he was completely fine after falling from way up there. The fact he was still alive and didn't hurt anywhere proved it.

“.....”

Takuto quietly pushed himself to his feet, a skeptical look on his face. He walked away to avoid running into anyone as he confirmed the Dark Elf guards were rushing to his location with his Commander skill.

He continued to walk for a while, turning his head this way and that to take in his surroundings. He eventually made his way to a tree that was the perfect size just outside the city and patted its trunk.

It was an ordinary giant tree common to this forest. If he had to find something different about it, it'd be that it was about one size larger than the rest of the trees and looked awfully creepy with the effects added from Mynoghra's Cursed Terrain. It was toward that tree that...Takuto casually waved his hand.

The giant tree snapped in half with a dull tremor.

"Why...?"

He felt like someone had answered his query somewhere.

"...I see. Is that how it is? Is that how it's always been?"

Takuto took one glance at the other trees being knocked down with the one he'd snapped like a twig, then plopped down on the ground, crossed his legs, and closed his eyes in quasi-meditation.

He delved deep within himself and confirmed the infinite possibilities possessed by the entity known as Takuto Ira and the presence of a power suitable to the King of Ruin.

Something answered his unasked question. Something that was there from the very beginning. It was just calmly waiting for the time he'd use its power.

"*Haha...* I could have won from the very beginning? I had it in me all along? Things could have been different from the start..."

Takuto's eyes flew open, and he let out a dry laugh as he raised his hand to his face. Everything seemed so ridiculous now, especially his own asinine stupidity. He'd reached the limit of his patience.

Something pivotal to the entity known as Takuto Ira snapped.



<Mynoghra's Palace, Emergency Meeting>

A strangely tense atmosphere hung over the Council Room within Mynoghra's Palace. Gathered around the table were the Hero Atou, the Elfuur Sisters, Elder Moltar, and the rest of the empire-management council members. In addition to the usual attendees, several civil officials and various lieutenant commanders in charge of separate Warrior corps were in attendance. And...the person who

sat quietly in the innermost part of the chamber was Takuto Ira, the Commander of Mynoghra and the King of Ruin.

“All right, King Takuto, please pass judgment on the Elfuur Sisters for violating orders. I advise you hand down appropriate punishment for the crime of disobeying your sovereign authority,” Atou solemnly stated the agenda for the meeting and asked Takuto to make a call.

The Elfuur Sisters in question were pensively standing near the wall, their somber attitude not unlike a convict on death row awaiting decapitation. The sisters were well aware of the magnitude of their crimes. They had charged head-first into the battlefield as their emotions dictated, when they should’ve returned to the imperial capital and defended Mynoghra.

Those who have power must protect their weaker allies. It was none other than their dear mother who taught them that important life lesson...and they’d done the exact opposite the moment they had power. That was why the twins were willing to accept any punishment—even if it was death most painful.

“Mmmm... There will be no punishment. They aren’t guilty.”

Takuto’s blunt decision wasn’t even close to what they’d imagined he might say, and not just the twins either, but everyone present wasn’t expecting him to make that call.

“I object, King Takuto!” Atou quickly interjected. “You won’t be able to keep a disciplined nation if you show lenience! Think of all the misunderstandings that will arise by needlessly forgiving the crimes of tergiversators during a national emergency!”

Punishing crimes is necessary for the continued existence of any nation. Of course, that punishment can be lessened based on extenuating circumstances or the kindness of a ruler. However, the people of this world had never heard of an acquittal before—they didn’t even know the concept. Minimal punishment, whatever that may be, was necessary to keep up formalities.

As everyone in the chamber stared in disbelief at Takuto, he shrugged, held up his hand, and changed the topic as if to say the matter was closed.

“During a national emergency, huh? I’m the one who needs to apologize to

everyone on that subject.”

Atou and a good portion of the council members gawked at him. Just before Atou could jump from her seat to stop him from uttering those forbidden words —

“I’m truly sorry. It was a situation invited by my carelessness and pride.”

—the king acknowledged his mistakes and apologized to his vassals.

“P-Please say nothing more! The king should never apologize! Never!”

“That’s right! It’s all due to our incompetence! Our carelessness invited this misfortune!”

The Dark Elves loudly objected on the spot.

That was the one thing they could never allow. That was the one thing he should have never done.

The king is an absolute being. His subordinates lay down their lives believing in his absoluteness. Thus, the king can never be wrong. He can never acknowledge his mistakes. Only mortals make mistakes, not kings. People do not follow a king who is on their level—who has become mortal. The heavy responsibility of leading a nation is too great to fall on any mortal, after all.

They needed him to take back what he just said no matter what.

Atou slumped back in her chair like the life had been sucked out of her. The disorder in the room was already beyond her ability to get under control, and she failed to come up with a solution no matter how she thought about it.

And their king was only just getting started dropping bombshells on them, too.

“And I swear to you on this day that I will bring Isla back.”

“D-Do you really mean it?”

“...You can bring her back to life?”

The twins’ eyes lit up. They’d been watching the conversation unfold with bemused curiosity since they didn’t understand what it meant for the king to apologize to his people, but it was a different story when it came to their

mother. Both girls had been trying to cope with the foreboding they felt inside but forgot all about it when Takuto mentioned Isla. Takuto even nodded affirmatively to their questions.

“P-Please wait just a moment, King Takuto! How do you plan to do that?! It’s absolutely impossible to revive a Hero under our...current circumstances!”

Atou was confused. She trusted Takuto, but she couldn’t even begin to guess where he was going with this. Just as she’d informed the twins before, there was no way to revive the Hero Isla. Takuto wasn’t the kind of person to make promises he couldn’t keep.

Has he gone mad? Atou wondered to her horror. If he had, they were beyond screwed...

But the truth surpassed anything they could possibly imagine.

“The civilization invited to heaven will live forever with ultimate happiness and unlimited peace,” Takuto recited in a booming, resonant voice.

Atou jerked her head up at those familiar words.

“There they will not experience hardship or pain, the dead will revive, loved ones will be reunited, and all will share in their happiness together. EXTOL YOUR VICTORY! Celebrate the joy of reaching another dimension. The gates to the Land of the Gods have opened, and you have ascended to an eternal existence with God’s love.”

Takuto quietly rose and threw his arms out, as if welcoming them. **“That’s what’s promised in an Ascension Victory. If this world runs based off *Eternal Nations’* system, then I will secure that victory. I *will* bring back all that has been lost.”**

Takuto had recited the lines that always played after achieving the victory known as Ascension Victory. It was a very different kind of victory type unique even within *Eternal Nations*, which could only be achieved after fulfilling multiple conditions.

The big problem was that...fulfilling those conditions was extremely difficult. An Ascension Victory was so ridiculously difficult to get that no player ever actively went after it more than a round or two. There was just the occasional

player looking for a new challenge or who was lured in to try it for themselves after seeing a video playthrough. In fact, even Takuto had tried his hand at it a few times but always lost interest and went for a Peace Victory or a Domination Victory.

“The conditions for an Ascension Victory are too strict. I fear other empires will interfere the moment you try to set up a Royal Prerogative, which is the prerequisite step...” Atou pointed out in a trembling voice. She was the only person who understood what he was talking about.

Reviving Isla should be possible with this victory condition. Atou didn’t know what kind of world the Heavens were, but it was where all the dead went to be resurrected...

“Interference from the other empires?” Takuto restated. **“Yeah, that’s likely.”**

“It won’t just be the forces of good either—we’ll be making an enemy of the whole world. Including Phon’kaven...”

The dialogue continued between king and confidant. The Dark Elves didn’t understand a word of it. They knew that their king occasionally spoke of things outside their realm of knowledge, and they assumed this was also a subject meant only for the gods.

But even they felt an overwhelming pressure within his words...and they could sense their king was speaking of a future rife with difficulty... After all, this was a path even a Hero considered too difficult.

What logic led their king to pick this thorny path?

While everyone worried, Takuto made another lighthearted-sounding declaration.

“It’ll be fine.”

“How?! How can you claim that it will be fine, King Takuto?!” Atou compelled him to answer her.

“Because I’ll kill everyone who gets in our way.”

Atou was momentarily paralyzed with fear. The Dark Elves experienced what

it felt like to be scared to death but still live, their souls tormented by terror with every breath.

At this point, everyone in the room finally understood what was going on with Takuto. He wasn't confused by anything. He wasn't rambling on about an impossible future in a manic state because his mind had broken under the onslaught of problems they'd been facing as of late.

It was none of those things but something worse. Takuto Ira was furious. His fury ran so deep he simply appeared to be manic and talkative on the surface.

No one knew what the source of his rage was. What they did know was that their souls were held in a vice by the anger Takuto was showing them for the first time, because while he was the King of Ruin, he'd never gotten angry at anyone before and always seemed friendly.

Thick, visceral pressure weighed down on everyone in the room like it had an invisible, crushing mass behind it. Cold sweat drenched them from head to toe, and their mouths were so dry, not even a breathy exhalation escaped their lips when they tried to speak.

Something that filled even Atou, the evilest of them all, with bone-chilling dread was sitting there in front of them.

“Listen up. The way to do it is simple.”

It was impossible to know how he perceived Atou's inability to talk back, but Takuto eloquently spoke for himself.

Ascension changes the very world itself. All hostile forces are modified per the victor's designs, and sometimes they even disappear from the face of the planet. Thus, an empire aiming for an Ascension Victory essentially declares itself the enemy of the world. Even allies will become enemies. The only way to avoid fighting an ally is to annex or vassalize them.

Would you still make that choice knowing you must be prepared to destroy everything you have built up? Anger was the determining factor that led to *Eternal Nations'* top player coming to the simplest conclusion.

“...We'll start by conquering the world.”

Unspeakable terror filled the hearts of every man and woman who heard his unimpeachable decree.

“Achieving each of the Ascension Victory’s conditions and then maintaining them is hard stuff, after all. So we’ll wipe every potential obstacle off the map before we get started.”

Cultivate all the land, bring down the skies, drink the oceans, destroy all living things, and then enjoy a leisurely ascension—that was pretty much what Takuto was suggesting.

They were no longer looking at a pacifist Commander. Nay, there was never a pacifist within him in the first place...

“I can think of so many things I can and should do. Things have never been this clear for me before.”

BLAM! CLANG!

Atou jumped with alarm at a sudden loud sound. She scanned the room, searching for the idiot who’d dared interrupt such a tense moment. The clanging continued to come from just behind Takuto.

“...?”

The rattling and clanging sounds of many things piling up on top of each other grew louder. Takuto was using Emergency Production. This was a phenomenon that all members of the empire-management council had witnessed at least once. But they didn’t recognize a single item that he’d produced this time. From the hard, metallic sounds, they could tell the items were hard, but they still wouldn’t know what they were even if they put their collective knowledge together.

The only exception to this was Atou.

When Atou realized the tiny round bronze object that rolled under her feet was a bullet, she gasped.

Handguns, machineguns, rifles, explosives—weapons from the world he’d lived in before were being produced behind Takuto. In that old world, human life wasn’t valued much in some areas. Frighteningly enough, tools made just to

take those lives were also available for a surprisingly cheap price. So cheap, in fact, you could purchase one for little more than the price of slightly high-quality wine.

Takuto picked up a nifty pistol from the pile of weapons and turned it over in his hand like he was observing its quality.

Emergency Production can produce any kind of item as long as you have the appropriate amount of Mana. It has a standard cost across all items and does not take the actual value of the item into consideration. He fiendishly used and abused that rule to produce the items from the Land of the Gods—aka Earth.

“You might all have to help me out even more than before now.”

He compared the paper materials he’d produced without realizing it with the pistols and nodded. As he expected, he was able to produce Earth weapons at a much lower Mana cost than other items. He also knew how to get back the Mana he’d just spent.

All the misery from the course of events leading up to this moment whispered to Takuto to take revenge on this world that rubbed his face in his defeat.

“I’ll be straight with you: the journey ahead won’t be easy. But...I know you can do it! I’m aware of how hard you’ve been working but be sure to listen to me from now on too, okay?!” Takuto insisted with childlike innocence.

His vassals could only tremble and hang their heads before the terrifying pressure emitted by the king’s words.

“Now then, let’s get to conquering the world!”

If history books were to later write about the decisive moment the world headed toward ruin, this would be it.

The arrival of the end was nearing with every passing event.

Somewhere, the *Nameless God* was laughing loudly.

Volume 3: End



Side Story: The Flesh Tree

DURING the days when Mynoghra was still at peace, right around the time Isla was summoned, and several days before Atou deployed to Dragontan, Mynoghra was constantly running into and fixing empire-management problems. Issues were bound to occur once they integrated Dark Elves as real live citizens into their empire and started forming a system of government that wasn't depicted in the actual game.

It goes without saying that the Dark Elves were far from incompetent. They had already established a system where they'd voluntarily resolve any issues within their ability. But they naturally still ran into problems outside their authority to solve alone. It was solely Atou's responsibility to be consulted on such small yet important matters.

Yet another such problem seemed to have sprung up again today.

Someone called out to Atou as she inspected the city and took in its growing prosperity.

"Excuse me, Lady Atou. May I have a moment of your time?"

"Yes, what is it?"

"I would like to consult you about the Flesh Trees..." Emle said.

Emle was the council member who'd single-handedly undertaken all matters related to Domestic Affairs. Her scope of work was as broad and varied as they come, and she was even taking on problems that shouldn't normally fall to her. She was bound to surpass her limits soon, but so far, she was putting her all into her work without a single complaint, which said a lot about how skilled she was and how much Mynoghra was still in its infancy.

With a satisfied smile on her face, Atou happily made time to listen to such a hard worker, hoping she could offer whatever assistance she could.

"It's King Takuto's wish to make our empire even bigger and better and to

lead his people to happiness, so I am more than happy to avail myself to you,” she said.

“Thank you very much. Then...I hate to ask this of you so soon, but I think it will be faster if you see the problem for yourself...”

“Oh? What in the world could possibly require me to see it to understand the problem?”

A problem that was faster explained by showing than telling had to have something to do with the terrain or buildings. If Emle just wanted normal management advice, explaining the statistics and details would be faster, and entreaties from the citizens would also come across better with words alone.

Seeing the disconcerted look on Emle’s face had Atou tilting her head and wondering if that big of an issue had crept into the current construction projects since she’d last checked...

Emle led her to the food silo and production facility unique to Mynoghra that took the place of a Granary, known as the Flesh Tree Nursery area.

“So...how big is this supposed to get?”

Emle started things right off by asking about what had been concerning her.

At her question, Atou craned her neck way back to look up and up at the Flesh Trees towering over her. The corners of her lips started to twitch.

I-It’s already too big...!

Indeed, the Flesh Trees were far too big. They had massively mutated and outgrown the size she knew them to be. They’d already grown to twice the size of a normal fruit tree and flaunted an even more overwhelming presence than before. As far as Atou knew, the Flesh Tree wasn’t supposed to grow so big. At the very least, the visuals from the game never depicted it as anywhere near this size.

“Er, since when did it end up like this?” she asked.

“From the beginning, I think? I also thought it wouldn’t grow any bigger once it reached the size of a typical fruit tree, but it hasn’t stopped growing...”

Emle gave Atou a pleading, confused look. Atou wanted to shout that she felt

the exact same way.

Just how big is it going to grow?

Atou clearly saw new growth and branches extending out of the top of the trees with her superhuman vision. Apparently, they were going to grow bigger yet. At this point, only the Flesh Tree itself knew how big it'd end up.

I honestly don't know the answer... But showing any concern about the matter will only harm the Heroes' reputation!!

"Hehe," Atou chuckled in a desperate attempt to show she knew all. "How big do you think it will get?"

Internally, she was sweating bullets because her bluff would crumble if Emle insisted on an answer. Fortunately, luck was on her side. Emle looked impressed by her seemingly thoughtful response and started acting like she was yet again awed by one of Mynoghra's great Heroes.

"I-I couldn't possibly guess! It would be imprudent of a puny Dark Elf such as I to dare assume I could possibly know anything about a plant from the Land of the Gods!!"

Victory is mine! Atou did a little celebratory dance on the inside as she became convinced of her success. All that was left was for her to put the final touches on it.

"There's no need to demean yourself so. Every single Dark Elf is one of our precious citizens after all..."

Emle was further moved by such an obvious line. Atou felt a little guilty for deceiving the awfully innocent Dark Elf woman, but she couldn't stop now that she'd come this far.

"Hehehe. Let's just say the answer to this question is a secret. It will be quite the treat for you to see how truly amazing His Majesty's plants are with your own eyes."

"Of course! That makes perfect sense! Thank you so much for going out of your way to tell me, Lady Atou!"

"You're very welcome. Please let me know if you need anything else. Oh, and

please continue to monitor the situation.”

And that was how Atou succeeded in perfectly deflecting the situation. Still, the issue at hand was an incredibly troubling one. Once Atou parted ways with Emle and was confident she was out of sight, she made a mad dash for the Palace.



“KING TAKUTOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOO!!!”

There was only one way for Atou to handle problems that she felt were too much for her: go and whine about it to Takuto, her king and the person she trusted most.

Atou burst into the Palace like a child in the middle of a tantrum and threw herself at Takuto with tears glistening in her crimson eyes.

“King Takuto! Something is making the Flesh Trees grow like skyscrapers! Just how big are they going to get?!” she whined at him.

She looked like she was in a real pickle this time. Even Takuto, who usually felt a little exasperated by her antics, sympathized with her completely on this occasion.

“Yeah, I saw it too... Wonder how it’ll turn out?”

Takuto Ira could see all the same things his vassals did. Atou, his Hero, was no exception, and he’d witnessed her conversation with Emle through their shared vision. In all honesty, Takuto was as in the dark about it as Atou was. This was a first for him, and he’d just assumed the trees would grow to be the same size as any other fruit tree.

Takuto racked his brain. The Flesh Trees didn’t have any flavor text that mentioned them growing to insane sizes. The Eterpedia only explained how it grew a Mystery Meat-like fruit that tasted like human flesh and said nothing about its ecology as a plant. So it was just as much of a mystery to him.

It didn’t help that *Eternal Nations* could get pretty vague when it came to its flavor text, and this world seemed to be taking its own liberties with the details too. He’d spotted plenty of changes thus far, none quite as amusing as the jovial

personalities given to the Brain Eaters. If his theory was right, then the giant Flesh Tree problem could have stemmed from this world filling in more of the vaguer details again.

“Maybe it took to the soil?” he ventured.

It wasn’t the most educated guess, but it still fit the situation. After all, they did put down roots in the curious terrain of the Accursed Lands. The land was unproductive and swamped with abnormally huge trees. Perhaps some sort of synergy with that particular environment led to the Flesh Tree’s monstrous growth.

Maybe the Flesh Tree is all pumped-up trying to meet the demand for Food and wants to put the rival trees around it to shame...? I’m not sure if something that crazy is actually possible, but I’m not willing to dismiss the idea when it’s already a freakish tree that produces oddly shaped fruit and beautifully green leaves within Cursed Terrain...

Takuto looked down at Atou, burying her face in his chest, her mood a thousand times better than when she’d entered the room, and their eyes met.

“Why don’t we call for the others?” Takuto said to deflect from his bashfulness as he gently removed her from his chest.



“I’LL be honest with you: the Flesh Trees have grown bigger than expected.”

Takuto’s strategy was to bluntly tell them the truth. Rather than making things more difficult to solve by dancing around the matter, he thought it was smarter to tackle the problem with everyone’s collective knowledge.

Mynoghra had a mountain of problems to deal with as it was. Now was an especially critical time to strengthen their ties with Phon’kaven and acquire whatever benefits they could from the relationship. Takuto didn’t want to waste time on such a trivial matter.

His decision directly resulted in Atou being drilled by Emle’s incredulous gaze, but Atou herself had already let the whole incident go. To her, Takuto came first in every way, so she didn’t care if her reputation suffered a blow due to one of his decisions.

At any rate, the more pressing matter was the Flesh Tree.

After answering the king's summons to come to the Flesh Tree Nursery, everyone who'd gathered before the freakish trees in question pulled a face at Takuto's confession.

“Could it be...you all noticed the problem before now?”

The Dark Elves each jerked back at his question. They couldn't ignore a query put forth by their king. Elder Moltar, the wisest of the Dark Elves, answered him with diffidence.

“I must admit I thought they were mighty impressive trees...”

The towering Flesh Trees almost seemed to be flaunting themselves in a way that suggested they were saying, “Eat me! Eat me!” Takuto wasn't sure if it was okay to humanize them so much, but they seemed motivated enough to outgrow the trees around them. Ultimately, that meant Mynoghra would soon be home to a strange tree that produced Mystery Meat Fruit that tasted like human flesh and would be large enough to build a house into. And not just one, but a nursery's worth of them...

Everyone there had vaguely considered the possibility of that happening. Major problems in big organizations are often caused by such situations. Multiple people notice a small issue but leave it in favor of their daily workload and higher priority concerns, letting it grow into an unmanageable problem. Not only were the Dark Elves guilty of that, but even Mynoghra's illustrious Heroes ignored it until it was too late.

“Th-That's a valid question. I may or may not have wondered if it was always supposed to be so big...”

Mynoghra's second highly regarded Hero, Isla, Queen of Bugs, answered Takuto's question next. It was hard to guess what she was thinking from her buggy compound eyes, but she clearly felt guilty when she turned her face away from him as she answered with an unusually shifty voice.

Takuto wanted to shout “Et tu, Brute?!” but he didn't think the reference to Julius Caesar would mean anything to anyone there, and he also didn't have the courage to try, so he quietly muttered **“I see”** instead.

When it came down to it, everyone in the council had turned a blind eye to the issue. Mynoghra's council members were busy enough as it was. Even Takuto had only just given it attention because of the report he'd received from Emle through Atou. If not for that, he most likely would've left it be even if he'd noticed the odd changes himself.

The trees were left to sprout up like overly eager skyscrapers because everyone had chosen not to deal with them. They were equally responsible.

“Practically speaking, what will the food production rate become if it grows as big as the other giant trees in this forest?” Takuto glanced at Elder Moltar and asked him to speculate about the future output.

Now wasn't the time to be looking for who they could shift the blame onto. Of course, in order to prevent such a thing from happening again, Takuto would need to implement the Japanese business practice of *HORENDO*, which stands for report, communicate, and consult. But before he could start creating the backbone to keeping a healthy flow of information going within his empire's infrastructure, he needed to do something about these incorrigibly motivated trees.

The current yield was already more than sufficient for the Dark Elves to survive. They were actually suffering from a surplus of Food, which had already led to talks of implementing a new process to dry the Mystery Meat into knock-off jerky.

It's better to have too much Food than to have too little. But having too much still comes with its own share of problems.

Elder Moltar immediately understood what Takuto was concerned about.

“I'm afraid the news isn't good,” he said. “If we go by my rough estimate, I imagine the supply will be so great that our storehouses will be bursting at the seams even after every citizen has eaten their full three times a day. Speaking conservatively, we can expect at least several times the current output...but I fear it may be more like ten times the amount...”

Things are worse than I imagined, Takuto thought, his hands getting clammy with the thought of having to deal with such excess. Even if they built more food Silos, they would be back to square one when those filled up. It would be

highly unproductive to get into an endless game of chicken trying to construct a Silo every time one filled up.

They couldn't just discard the excess supply either. The fruit produced by the Flesh Tree—known commonly as Mystery Meat—replicated human flesh to an eerily realistic degree. The fleshy fruit undeniably had muscle tissue, blood vessels, and even fat. Moreover, the fruit's juices were blood. Real blood. An outbreak of the plague was unavoidable if they haphazardly discarded it.

The citizens of Mynoghra were evil-aligned, so they were relatively resistant to plagues and poisons, but they weren't immune. A decrease in public hygiene would increase the spread of disease and reduce the number of healthy workers.

If that wasn't bad enough, there was no limit to the Mystery Meat produced by the Flesh Trees. Spoiled meat would eventually overflow from their landfills and bury all of Mynoghra under its rot. Heck, they might even be responsible for drowning the world in Mystery Meat.

Takuto had experienced almost every kind of Game Over possible, but this would go down in history as the most humiliating and absurd. That settled it. This problem needed to be nipped in the bud before it was too late...

Isla raised one of her raptorial forearms and asked, "Won't soil exhaustion and nutrient depletion happen long before that? We don't want the whole ecosystem to collapse on us..."

The law of conservation of energy and the law of conservation of mass are always at play in the natural world. Plants absorb nutrients from the earth and through photosynthesis to grow and bear fruit. Planting the same type of crop repeatedly in the same area will drain the land of the nutrients needed for its growth, making the land less fertile over time.

Even the most common crops are susceptible to this, so it wasn't hard to imagine what would happen with a nursery of Flesh Trees eagerly outgrowing the ginormous trees native to the Accursed Lands.

As one of Mynoghra's Heroes, Isla had access to some of Takuto's knowledge from modern Earth, just as Atou did. That, coupled with her own common sense, made her worry about Mynoghra's land becoming tired and infertile.

Except she was forgetting one thing...their common sense didn't align with the common sense of this world and the system that governed it.

“This land never had any nutrients to deplete from the start.”

“It's certainly easy to forget the difficulties we had trying to grow anything before the Flesh Trees...”

Takuto and Elder Moltar's remarks instantly assuaged Isla's concerns.

The Flesh Trees were pumping out Mystery Meat without abiding by the laws of conservation. At this point, their production was more within the realm of alchemy than the laws of nature. The problem was becoming more difficult to control by the minute.

“Does that mean there's no need to consider soil exhaustion?” Atou asked. “Then that leaves us with the more pressing concern of how to deal with the excess food—or rather, the Mystery Meat Surplus...”

“Exactly, Lady Atou. We'll have a real problem on our hands if we don't do something soon...” Elder Moltar said.

Everyone thought that soil exhaustion would've been easier to deal with but felt it was a tad problematic to voice that opinion aloud. So they racked their brains to find a solution to the bizarre problem that was now threatening Mynoghra's future.

“How about thinning them out in moderation, master?” Isla was the first to offer a suggestion, perhaps to make up for her earlier comment being off the mark. “Pruning the trees and properly handling fruit crop load management is just as important as anything else.”

Under any other circumstance, her solution would've been right on the mark as it drew from common knowledge of how to manage fruit trees. But common sense ran into yet another roadblock here.

“No, that won't— Actually, Isla, try cutting off that branch.”

“As you command, my master...”

This was a case where showing would be faster than telling. With that in mind, Takuto gave Isla the order, and she swung one of her giant sickle arms at

the branch as he commanded. The branch of the nearest unfortunate Flesh Tree was instantly severed by the overwhelming force and sharp cutting edge of her forearm.

“GYAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAH!!”

A deafening scream promptly echoed throughout the city from the pruned Flesh Tree. After informing all the panicking Dark Elves that there was no need for concern through his Commander skill, Takuto forced an indescribably tired smile. Not even he had expected its scream to be so...brain-rattling and grisly.

“See, the Flesh Trees...cry out bloody murder when you try to uproot or prune them like this.”

“Are they related to mandrakes or something...?”

Sadly, the Flesh Trees let out a shriek capable of bursting eardrums whenever anyone tried to cut them down or pull them out of the ground. Takuto had literally just learned this fact when he looked them up in the Eterpedia for any hint on how to dispose of them. He cradled his head in his hand after realizing the entry had additional flavor text added since he’d last checked it.

He was willing to overlook the Flesh Tree’s idiosyncrasies since it made for an interesting plant creature, but he was concerned *Eternal Nations’* flavor text could be added to. All of Takuto’s strategies were formed based on his experience playing *Eternal Nations* and from the information he gleaned from its Eterpedia entries. It’d be unbearable if his carefully calculated strategies were rendered useless by newly added random details.

There should be a limit to even the most nightmarish of Nightmare Modes.

It wouldn’t be as simple as just revising his strategies when the time came, because he’d never know when it’d introduce an empire-toppling problem. At least it didn’t seem as dire as it could be when his first real problem of that sort revolved around overly motivated Flesh Trees...

Then again, it shouldn’t have really come as that big of a shock when this seemed to be the trend. This world didn’t seem to be applying *Eternal Nations’* settings exactly how they were in the game as much as altering and adapting them in one way or another to fit. A perfect example of this was the goods he

could produce with Emergency Production. A lot of those items couldn't be found within *Eternal Nations*, so that was a case of the world adapting things in their favor.

Viewing everything as the same as the game will only come back to bite me. Takuto was starting to vaguely realize that fact, and yet there was still this optimistic side of him that thought everything would work out in the end.

“So, to summarize, our only option here is to figure out what to do with this Mystery Meat that tastes like human flesh rather than how to dispose of the eager tree that pumps it out like there's no tomorrow...?” Atou muttered, exhausted.

This was where the council identified the list of problems they had to contend with:

First, the Flesh Trees were hell-bent on growing as big and tall as possible. At a minimum, they were bound to grow as large as the native towering trees of the Accursed Land. There was even a chance they would outgrow their neighbors.

Second, pruning and cutting down the trees was out of the question. The Flesh Trees would torment Mynoghra's citizens with their wailing shrieks with every snip or cut of their limbs.

Third, they needed to properly consume the Mystery Meat. Not just dispose of it but consume it. With its production rates, it'd eventually outdo whatever disposal method.

“Is this some kind of punishment?”

Takuto felt it was hopeless after he reread the list. He tasted the despair of someone who had to waste their precious time on something so trivial yet unignorable when they already had a mountain of more important things to do.

If worse came to worst, he could always use *Eternal Nations'* strategy game mechanics to forcefully deconstruct the Flesh Trees, which counted as a facility, but doing so would give him the opposite problem of having no Food and causing Mynoghra's citizens to starve to death.

“Anyone have any suggestions?”

Takuto was open to any ideas at this point. They say that three heads are better than one—the chances of a surprisingly useful plan being suggested would increase with more people brainstorming. He was desperate for a solution if possible, but he'd even settle for an ingenious idea to help them maintain the status quo.

“How about using it for trade with Phon’kaven, master?” Isla proposed.

“That would be perfect if we could make it work, Isla...” Atou answered on Takuto’s behalf.

That was a great idea. A marvelous one, in fact.

The only GLARING drawback was that the Mystery Meat had this annoying trait that made you think you were consuming human flesh when you ate it. And in this instance, the people of Phon’kaven rather unfortunately didn’t have a habit of eating human flesh...

So that idea was out. Way out.

“How about moving up the production of Mynoghra’s unique race, the Homunculus?” Elder Moltar suggested. “We could encourage them to reproduce like rabbits...”

“Unfortunately, the Flesh Tree’s productivity increases with the size of the city,” Atou answered. “In other words, it’s highly likely they will ramp up their output to match our growing population...”

The Flesh Tree’s bonuses worked in conjunction with the city’s size. This was what made it such an effective facility until the end of the game, but that only added to their real-life plight now.

“Master, why don’t you try increasing the number of Larva I spawn?” Isla suggested, then continued the second half of her proposal in a private telepathic message. *“I also believe it should be possible to exchange unnecessary Food once you build a Market.”*

Why didn’t I think of that?! Takuto inwardly gave his knee a good slap at that epiphany.

“I completely overlooked that option.”

Isla's proposal was the first light to illuminate what seemed like impossible darkness for them. They would only be postponing the inevitable, but there were plenty of uses for Isla's Larva, which could serve as labor units. Once they filled enough labor slots, they could then be swapped over to combat units, making them a mighty force to contend with indeed. And, of course, Food would be consumed in proportion to their numbers.

Bringing up the Market was about as inspired of an idea as they came.

Among the buildings that can be built within *Eternal Nations* is one called a Market. It mainly boosts the productivity of Mana, which is equivalent to Currency in the game, and gives trade bonuses, while also unlocking the Trade system.

Trade allows the player to buy and sell Materials, Food, Strategic Resources, and the like based on Mana. Moreover, the Trade system is unique because the value doesn't fluctuate based on the buying and selling of goods, and there's no upper limit to the trading volume.

If this unrealistic limitlessness could be used in this world the same way it worked in the game, then the range of strategies available to him would be expanded at once with the various supplies and Mana he could buy with his Food surplus. Then the incorrigible Mystery Meat production machines would instantly turn into his golden goose.

Of course, it was nothing more than wishful thinking until he could verify if it worked, so he'd keep it just between him and Isla for now. But their potential would explode if it did work. It was definitely a plan worth adopting.

“Why don't we go with Isla's plan for now?”

Everyone nodded firmly along with Takuto's suggestion. They all had a feeling they wouldn't be able to come up with anything better even if they wasted more time on it.

“Discussion about what measures we need to take in the future are on hold until further notice.”

“A wise decision, Your Majesty,” Elder Moltar said. “New ideas might spring up with time.”

There are several ways to find a solution to a problem. One such way is to temporarily shelve the problem and reconsider it at a later point once the situation becomes clearer and the organization is more capable of handling it. At first glance, that might seem like neglecting the problem or procrastinating, but it's the most effective method when there are no measures to be taken at the current stage or a stopgap measure to apply.

Continued monitoring and management would be necessary, but this wasn't the wrong decision for Mynoghra at this point.

"I agree. We don't know how big they will actually grow until we see it for ourselves."

Atou was absolutely right about that. Their concerns might've been for naught if the trees didn't grow that big...or they could shoot up to ten times bigger than expected. Either way, they needed to closely scrutinize the data before taking concrete measures.

"Plus, aren't the Flesh Trees strictly grown and managed within the nursery? Then they shouldn't spread as long as we don't artificially plant their seeds elsewhere."

"Then that means we just need to properly manage the trees within this controlled area," Elder Moltar summarized.

"And if we do that, the problem shouldn't grow out of control. As for handling the Mystery Meat, we might have a surplus right now, but demand will catch up if the number of cities under Mynoghra's control increases."

"Oh yeah! I didn't think about that."

Takuto slapped his hands together. The Flesh Trees may have a fast growth rate, but they only grew vertically. There was a limit to how thick they could grow, and their numbers wouldn't increase without Mynoghra planting more. The situation would only improve if they could withstand the current problems it presented.

"It looks like we'll be spared from the worst-case scenario."

The whole council sighed in unison with relief over there being a solution. As much as Mynoghra was an empire full of supernatural phenomena, it was

ridiculous for a mere building—a plant, in fact—to bring about a national crisis that threatened its future existence.

Takuto shook his head, shrugged his shoulders, then walked up to a Flesh Tree and said “Don’t cause me too much trouble, you hear?” as he patted its trunk.

His comment was met with a downpour of Mystery Meat.

“...E-Even if it’s just a plant, it’s still a member of Mynoghra! There’s no way it’d intentionally try to cause trouble for King Takuto!!”

“L-Little Atou is absolutely right! I’m sure even this sapling will put its heart and soul into serving our master’s wishes!!”

The two Heroes tried their best to appease their king, but Takuto only felt like things were going to get worse from here. He was only just getting started bringing elements from Mynoghra into this world. There were plenty more crazy loyal creatures like the Long-Legged Bugs and the Brain Eaters and even more wacky buildings than the Flesh Trees for him to put into play. And then there were the rest of the Heroes, each missing a few more screws than the last.

That jack-in-the-box filled with gunpowder and live coals was just waiting for him to let it pop open. In any event, stimulating days were ahead of him.

Unsure of how he felt about that, Takuto finished off that awfully exhausting day’s worth of work.



Flesh Tree

Building

Food	+ 1
Food Production	+ 10%
Mabeast Unit Regeneration	+ 10%
Units with <Taste for Human Flesh> Regeneration	+ 50%

NO IMAGE

Description:

~It's a fabulous tree that can produce Food even in barren terrain. Of course, it's only fabulous if you can ignore the fact that it tastes like human flesh, has boundless vigor and fertility, and screams like a little girl when you try to cut it down...~

The Flesh Tree is a building unique to Mynoghra that takes the place of a Granary. In addition to its Food benefits, it also increases the Regeneration rate of Mabeast Units. It also greatly increases the Regeneration rate of units with the trait: <Taste for Human Flesh>.

Concept Materials

Meet the fascinating characters from the RPG Brave Questers! You can enjoy the concept art not included in the game below.

Demon Lord

The great threat to the world the Hero must defeat.
He embodies all the sins and evil deeds mankind has accumulated over the centuries.

【1st Form】

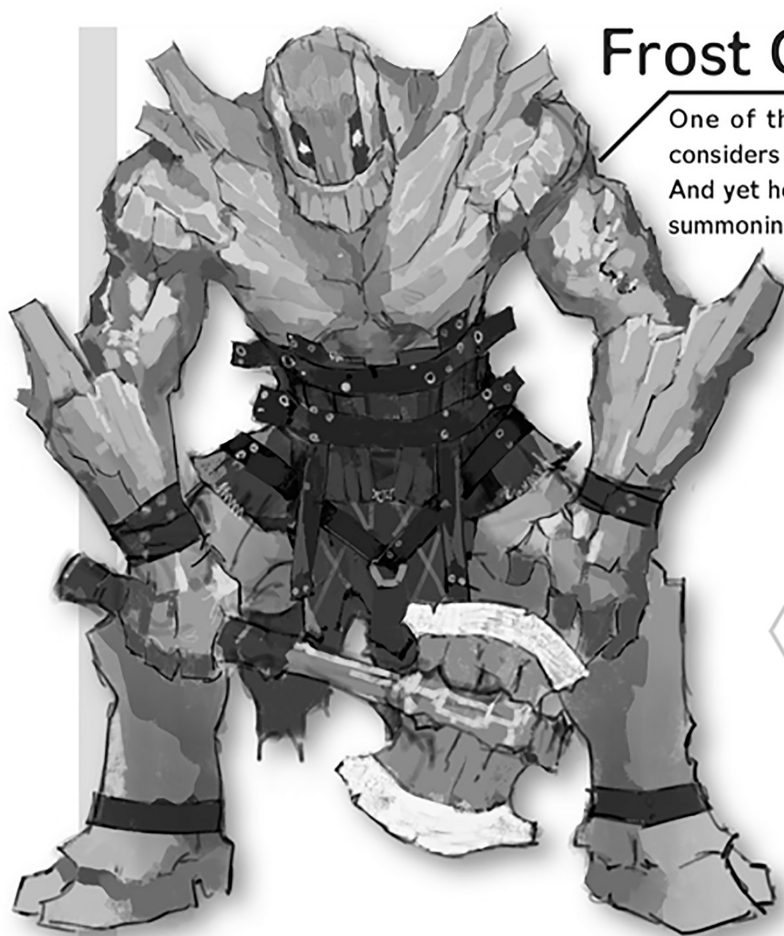


【2nd Form】



Frost General Ice Rock

One of the Demon Lord's Four Generals who considers himself an honorable warrior. And yet he's quite underhanded when it comes to summoning his underlings.



Flame Demon Flamin

One of the Demon Lord's Four Generals who's so ruthless he's feared by his allies. He's a former human sorcerer who became a demon through black magic.



Afterword

FEHU Kazuno here. It's nice to greet you all again after the wait between this and the last volume! First, allow me to express my heartfelt gratitude to you for picking up *Apocalypse Bringer Mynoghra Volume 3*. I hope the story was satisfying for you this time as well.

By the way, Volume 3, like the previous volumes, has also undergone massive revisions and rewrites to become an even better version of the story from the original web novel. This series is the published version of what I originally serialized on the user-generated novel publishing website *Shōsetsuka ni Narō*. You can still read the Japanese web novel version on that site, but you'll probably notice many changes to the story if you do.

I worked extra hard to make the web novel readers experience new surprise twists and have a different impression from the original, so I hope you enjoyed the new content! In addition to the text changes, the ever-talented Jun-sensei has also provided stunning illustrations for this volume. Even if you've already read the web version, I can guarantee that the pictures will make you feel even more immersed in the story.

Of course, I put my whole heart into writing this story so that people reading it for the first time in published form and those who have come from the manga version can enjoy it too! I'd be thrilled if you liked it.

Speaking of the manga version, the first volume of Yasaiko Midorihana-sensei's *Apocalypse Bringer Mynoghra* is now available for purchase in Japan. Everyone's favorite, adorable Hero Atou gets to go on a rampage with her evil and happy-go-lucky friends in comic form. It's a fantastic adaptation that draws out all the best scenes from the original. If you haven't checked it out yet, head on over to the bookstore as soon as you can! It's currently being serialized on *NicoNico Seiga* and *ComicWalker*, so you can check it out there, too, if you like.

Now it's time to move on to the usual acknowledgments. Thanks to the efforts of many people, we were able to bring this volume into existence.

Illustrator Jun, thank you so much for continuing to draw the art for the light novel version. I'm in awe of your ability to so perfectly draw the scenes every time based on my vague directions. There's still so much I would love to see you draw, so I look forward to continuing to work with you.

To the editing department at GC Novels and my editor, thank you for giving your all to work with me despite how vague some of my work can sometimes be. You were a tremendous help when it came to the Eterpedias and System Messages.

To the proofreaders, design company, and everyone else, thank you for everything you do. I'm truly grateful for all your assistance on so many levels. This book only exists because of you.

And last but not least, I wish to express my deepest gratitude to you, the reader. I can never be grateful enough for all the encouragement I've received since I started writing this series.

I hope to see you in the next afterword and ask that you continue to support me!

CONGRATULATIONS ON MYNOGHRA VOLUME 3!

-JUN





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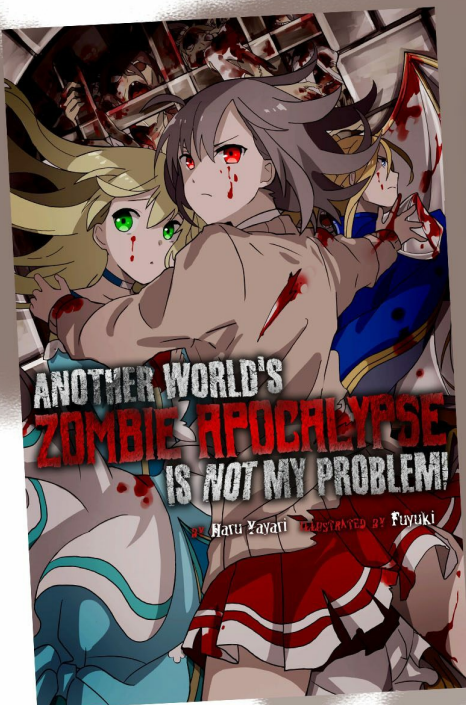


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